



Overcoming challenges in
Danish-Chinese e-mail business communication

BA i Erhvervsprog og International Erhvervskommunikation

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Projektdeltagernes CPR-nr. (10 cifre) og navne (blokbogstaver)

Navn : **Christian Villum**

Navn : **Julie Rosenkrantz Gjedsted**

Navn : **Mette Næsby**

Navn : **Morten Haggren Brynildsen**

Vejleder : **David Stevens**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Framework and background

*Given the likely increase in intercultural interaction over global computer networks, it becomes apparent then that because people from different cultures are 'on the net' and because cultural differences can effect communication and lead to possible misunderstandings and conflict, intercultural computer-mediated communication (ICCMC) merits study.*¹

Since the cultural revolution in China in 1978 Chinese business has slowly but gradually turned away from the former state governed economy towards the free market economy shared by the Western hemisphere. The privatisation of companies has opened the doors for Chinese business to the rest of the world. As a result of this, Danish-Chinese business has increased substantially. However, despite an increasingly globalised world, there are still several intercultural challenges to overcome when doing business internationally.

These intercultural aspects and challenges in particular and their influence on business communication will be the subject matter of this report.

Throughout the last century and into this one, we have all at some point been made aware of the fact that the world is becoming more and more globalised every day.

But what is globalisation and how does it affect us and our lives? It is our guess that most people know that it has something to do with breaking down barriers and trading beyond the borders of your own country and region.

To use a more scientific description, however, Sunderland University senior lecturer Janet Morrison says that the *term describes a number of processes by which products, people, companies, money and information are able to move freely and quickly around the world, unimpeded by national borders or other territorial limitations.*²

Joseph Stiglitz, former WTO-employee and economic Nobel Prize winner, now political writer, focuses on technological advances and the changing political climate in his formulation, when stating that the closer integration *has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of*

¹ Hart: 1998

² Morrison: 2002, p. 31

*transportation and communication and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge and people across borders.*³

Lastly, emphasizing the interpersonal and intercultural dimension, Morrison further establishes that globalisation brings people *from different cultural backgrounds into routine contact with each other and each other's cultures.*⁴

China is embracing this development, and through massive education initiatives the country is open to meet international demands. Even language barriers are being diminished as the Chinese language spreads across universities all over the globe, while English spreads throughout China. Chinaview.cn, a major Chinese news website, broadcasted that *China is probably one of the few countries in the world where learning English has almost become a national obsession.*⁵

1.2 General theme

So what are the intercultural challenges that Danish businesses encounter when initiating contact with large Chinese companies?

The concept of a globalised world, with English as the universal language and the technology to communicate instantly world-wide, makes the obvious restraints on cross-continental trade seem diminished. But only in theory, that is. In reality there are still major gaps between European (and thereby Danish) and Asian (and thereby Chinese) business. To cross these gaps, one must consider the cultural and communicative aspects of international commerce.

For this report, the overall theme will be investigating how to overcome the complexity and challenges in initial business e-mailing from Danish to Chinese businesses.

1.3 Statement of problem

What is the optimal way of increasing the effectiveness and level of persuasion when composing an initial business e-mail from a Danish company to a Chinese counterpart?

³ Stiglitz: 2003, p. 9

⁴ Morrison: 2002

⁵ Chinaview.cn: 2006

Our aim is to raise the efficiency of initial e-mail writing from a Danish company to a potential Chinese business partner through the use of communicative tools and cultural awareness. It is our impression that especially the initial correspondence determines whether a proposal is successful or not.

To ensure a realistic and practical approach towards the problem, we will use local software developer Progressive Media (PM) as the empirical subject of our analysis.

The goal of the report is to create useful and accurate guidelines for PM on how to communicate effectively with a Chinese recipient and avoid culturally based conflicts.

We will analyse an example of an initial e-mail proposal written by PM and use the results hereof to produce specific communicative tools for the endeavour of entering the Chinese market.

PM is a relatively young company specializing in the development and licensing of games for mobile phones, and they are currently contracting with a range of partners in several European countries. With blooming success in their own region of the world, PM consider themselves ready to engage the Asian market, primarily China, where the market for games for mobile phones is growing rapidly. So far only a few attempts to engage Asia have been made and they have turned out unsuccessful.

The recipient of the e-mail proposal from PM will be one of their two major types of partners, namely distributors or publishers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Theory

The first part of this section is a stepping stone, establishing the definition of culture that we find applicable for this report. For this chapter, we will rely mainly on the works of Aalborg University professor Hans Gullestrup with strong references to the internationally well-esteemed studies of the Dutch anthropologist Geert Hofstede. This section uncovers the general pitfalls and potential areas of misunderstanding one must be aware of when communicating across different cultures. We had a meeting with Professor Gullestrup in which we discussed the general aspects of his works. During the conversation we took notes, from which we have extracted his most useful views for implementation in selected chapters of this report.

After having accounted for our cultural basics, we will turn our focus on to the business world as a subculture, and present the tools that we will use in practice in the actual analysis.

We have chosen to use the dimensional tools of Dutch experts on culture and business, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (as well as selected elements from Hofstede), Norwegian scholar, Richard Gesteland, and American anthropologist Edward T. Hall.

The second part of the theory account consists of our own custom-made transmission model containing the most important communicative instances relevant to our analysis. This will be succeeded by a thorough explanation of the elements in the model.

The third and final part of our theoretical section will set out the more pragmatic, linguistic aspects that exist in any correspondence. We will provide an account of rhetorical tools that apply, among these appeals of argumentation, the AIDA model, and contemporary acknowledged guidelines for e-mail authoring in terms of composition, move structure, basic grammar and such.

For the communicative and linguistic theoretical accounts we will employ theories of many recognized theorists. The most essential among these are: Professor David Crystal, one of the world's foremost experts on the subject of language, American author and expert on technical

writing David A. McMurrey, authors Professor Steven M. Gerson and Sharon J. Gerson, who are experts within the field of technical language and business writing, and Zhu Yunxia, Chinese senior lecturer and researcher at Unitec, Auckland in New Zealand. Furthermore we have accounted for the work of Israeli Professor Pnina Shachaf, who works as assistant Professor of Library and Information Science in the US.

2.2 Analysis

The analysis will be conducted methodically. It will be divided into three sections, each one containing a piece of the puzzle for providing the most optimal approach to composing business e-mail proposals:

The focus of the first chapter will be put on characterising the specific contemporary Chinese and Danish business cultures, as portrayed by a range of scientific and hands-on sources, as described below. The analyses will be intertwined in a diagram for easy comparison purposes.

Empirical data for the Chinese part of the analysis will include accounts from scholars such as author Scott Seligman, former office manager of the National Council for US-China Trade in Beijing as well as Tim Ambler and Morgen Witzel, Senior Fellows at the London Business School. Further we will implement essential elements from *Harvard Business Review on Doing Business in China* and Gesteland's accounts on the profile of the typical Chinese businessman will be included. These accounts will be held against data derived from a questionnaire given to Danish postgraduates with internship experience in China as well a Danish industrial designer, currently employed in China.

For the Danish business culture analysis our main empirical data sources include a combination of literature, abovementioned interviews, and a dissertation made at Aalborg University in the spring of 1998 by Pernille Kjær who focuses on cultural encounters and understanding. Her report conducts an analysis of Danish business associates' cultural understanding based on their assessment of cultural differences in intercultural interaction.

Literature-wise, we will again draw upon Gesteland's cultural studies, as well as extracts from the works of the Danish Ph. D. Verner Worm, who used to live, do research and work in China, and is

now an affiliate of Copenhagen Business School's Institute for International Economics and Management, as well as Asia Research Centre. He has done extensive comparative Danish/Chinese research work.

Subsequently, we will analyse the two countries comparatively through the dimensions chosen in the cultural theory section. The empirical foundation for this will be the examples and practical accounts of the cultural authors mentioned above, combined with our interview with PM CEO Thomas Nielsen.

From this analysis we will extract the most important conclusions and insert them in a diagram. The purpose of the diagram will be to work out a cultural frame for the second part of the analysis.

The second part will contain an analysis of a sample of PM's e-mail proposals. This analysis will be juxtaposed to a sample of a Chinese sales letter from Zhu Yunxia's *Written Communication across Cultures. A sociocognitive perspective on business genres*.

2.3 Communicative strategy guide

The comparison of the two letters constitutes the foundation for our communicative strategy guide, summarizing main points in an overview of the structure of an optimal business e-mail proposal.

The guide will ensure that PM is well-prepared and aware of the cultural and communicative challenges applying for Danish-Chinese cross-cultural business communication.

3. Cultural theory

3.1 Culture in general

To be able to treat the intercultural aspects of this report, it is necessary to elucidate precisely what we understand by the term *culture*, and how we wish to approach cultural studies.

Several different approaches exist to the study of culture, one of these being the functionalistic approach, which we will be employing in this report. With this approach, the focus is on values and cultural differences as a starting point and the study of human behaviour and actions. What makes us act and talk the way we do? What are the norms that distinguish us from other cultures? Hofstede and Gullestrup among others have been known to adopt this approach.⁶

Hofstede conducted a very comprehensive and famous study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture, and from this he derived his five cultural dimensions that help differentiate cultures.⁷ His work has been the foundation and inspiration of numerous anthropologists since then, including Gullestrup.

We will be using the theory of Gullestrup predominately as a stepping stone, taking his assertions, terms and approach with us in to the dimensional theories of Trompeneaars, Hall, Hofstede and Gesteland. It is their dimensions that we will use as the actual practical tools for our analysis further on in this report.

The flexibility of Gullestrup's cultural analysis enables us to create our own specific approach to the analysis of Chinese and Danish business culture in conjunction with the more stringent, bipolar theories and models of the theorists mentioned above. We hereby aim to obtain a general understanding of business culture as a subculture to national cultures, which will be explained in the following.

Firstly, however, we will present the theory of Gullestrup along with his definition of culture which we will utilize in this report:

⁶ Frandsen et al: 2002A, p. 107

⁷ Dahl: 2004: p. 12

*Culture is the philosophy of life and the values, rules, moral standards and the actual behaviours – as well as the material and immaterial products from these – that people (in a given context and in a given period of time) take on from a previous ‘generation’ – and that they endeavour to transmit, possibly in a modified form, to the following ‘generation’ – and that somehow separates them from people belonging to other cultures.*⁸

The word generation is in this case to be understood not only as family generations, but as descendants in a specific context, meaning for example a teacher-student or manager-employee relationship etc.⁹

3.1.1 The cultural analysis of Hans Gullestrup

Gullestrup defines three dimensions in his cultural analysis studies. In the *horizontal culture dimension* he speaks of eight segments, which are to be seen as mechanisms to fulfil the basic needs of any human being:¹⁰

⁸ Gullestrup: 2003, p. 55

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Gullestrup: 1992, p. 30

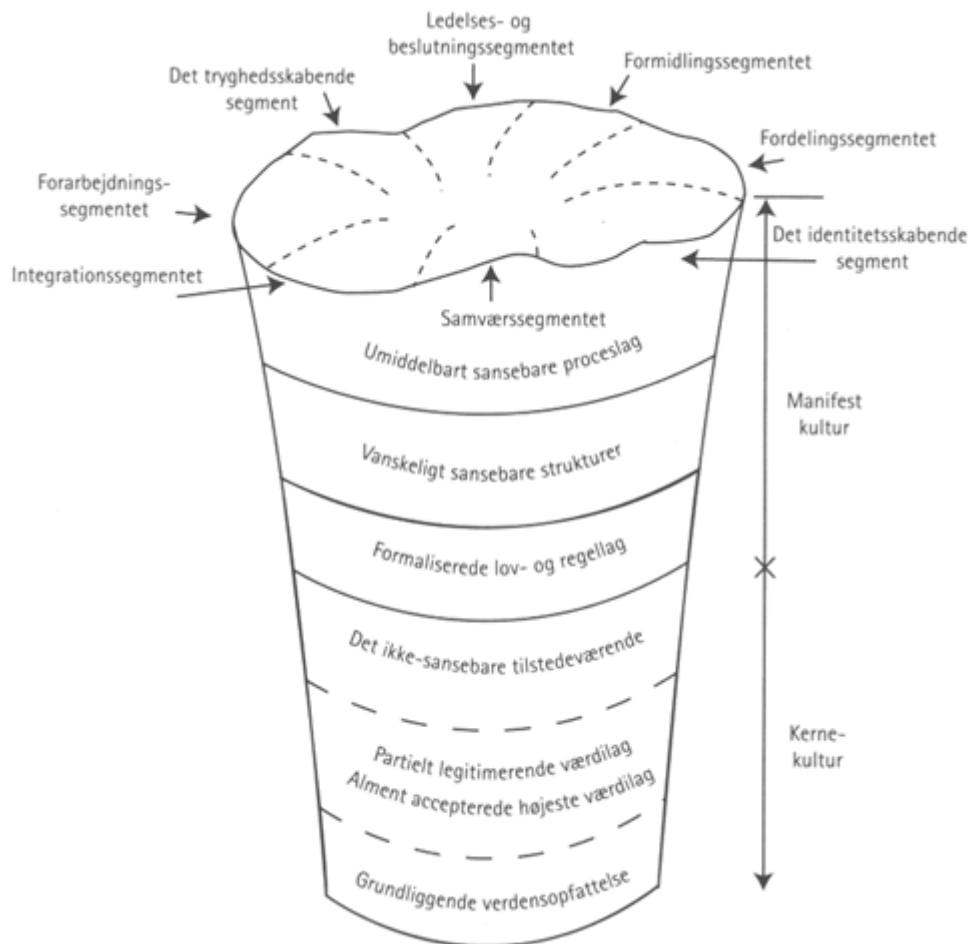
The processing segment	How nature is processed/ Technology
The distribution segment	How the output is distributed /Economic institutions
The social segment	How the individuals live together / Social institutions
The management and decision segment	Who controls whom?/ Political institutions
The conveyance segment	How knowledge, ideas, and values are disseminated among individuals and groups/ Language and communication in the widest sense
The integration segment	How the individuals and the unit are integrated, maintained and developed/ Reproduction and socialization
The identity-creating segment	How a common identity is created and preserved/ Ideology
The security-creating segment	How the view of the relationship between life and death is manifested/ Religious institutions

The eight segments constitute the concept of culture, and are equally important in the sense that none can be left out in obtaining a complete understanding of a culture. However, one segment can be the main focus area depending on which type of study is being conducted.¹¹

This is exactly what we will do, by implementing only the social segment and the conveyance segment, as illustrated in the model below. The social segment is applicable in this context seeing that aspects such as *harmony*, *guanxi*, and the importance of establishing a relationship fall into this

¹¹ Gullestrup: 1992, p. 33

category, as we will prove subsequently.¹² Through the conveyance segment we are able to treat the aspects of linguistics and communication.¹³



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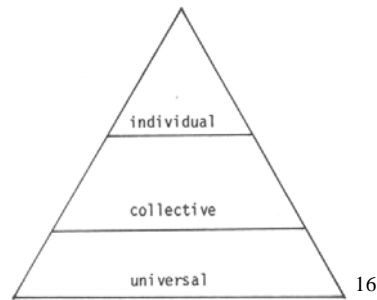
In longer periods of interaction between people, human behaviour becomes predictable to a certain degree. Hofstede calls this our *mental programs*.¹⁵ This refers to the idea that people follow a specific pattern or program determined by previous experience and norms. The mental program is impalpable and can not be seen or even measured, only the behavioural results thereof. A person's mental program is in some cases similar to those of other individuals, but can also be specific. Hofstede distinguishes between three programs; the *universal*, the *collective* and the *individual*:

¹² Cf. definition of guanxi chapter 6.1

¹³ Cf. definition of harmony chapter 6.1

¹⁴ Gullestrup: 2003, p. 101

¹⁵ Hofstede in Gullestrup: 1992, p. 35



The universal program is shared by almost every human being, and it is what makes us breathe, provide for ourselves, and is also the reason, for instance, why we get happy or sad in certain situations.

The collective program is shared by people who belong to the same culture or society, and affects *what kind* of food we eat, and *what exactly* makes us happy or sad.

The individual program is unique for all of us, and refers to specific characteristics that are distinctive to every individual.¹⁷

Distinguishing between the individual and the collective programs can be difficult, since they can sometimes overlap, but the focus of this report will be the collective program in connection with both the horizontal and *vertical culture dimension*. As mentioned before, the collective program can not be observed as such, but it is possible to study its consequences.

In the vertical culture dimension Gullestrup makes a distinction between the *manifest culture* and the *core culture* – the first being the immediate observable behaviour and attitudes, and the latter being the intangible, fundamental hidden values and ideas.¹⁸ Both layers have been divided into three levels starting from a level of observation to a deeper and more profound understanding of core values:

¹⁶ Hofstede: 1984, p. 16

¹⁷ Hofstede in Gullestrup: 1992, p. 36

¹⁸ Frandsen et al: 2002A, p. 115

The manifest culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The level of immediately observable symbols or symptoms 2. The structures that are difficult to observe 3. The governing morals, patterns, and norms
The core culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The present but non-observable layer 5. The fundamental values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partially legitimating values • The generally accepted highest values 6. The fundamental philosophy

The horizontal dimension is linked closely to the vertical dimension through the upper three layers. The layers of the manifest culture are more or less visible aspects of a culture such as everyday behaviour, language, business ethics and relations, traditions and norms, whereas the layers of the core culture make up hidden and less tangible values such as taboos, the concept of labour, social responsibility, the issues of life and death etc.¹⁹

The layers of the core culture are hidden in the sense that we, as human beings, are not always consciously aware of our values and are therefore not always able to explain them. An understanding of these layers requires a study of how exactly these values are visible in the actual manifest behaviour.

The layers of the manifest culture can be seen as symbols of the layers of the core culture in the way that the things we are able to observe in behaviour and attitude are reflections of deeper, objective values.²⁰

The third dimension is the *time dimension*.

Naturally cultures evolve and change over time, but since we are looking at the business culture at one given moment, the influence of time as an aspect thereby diminishes.

¹⁹ Gullestrup: 1992, pp. 46-48

²⁰ Gullestrup: 2003, p. 81

3.1.2 Approaching a foreign culture

To be able to treat the horizontal and the vertical culture dimensions it may be relevant to broaden definitions and distinguish primary cultures on the basis of world views to obtain tangible elements for comparison. An example hereof is the Western culture as opposed to the East-Asian culture etc., or in this case national cultures such as the Danish and the Chinese culture. A national culture consists of every individual who call himself for example Chinese, and therefore creates a more or less artificial line or border. Within this national culture, several subcultures naturally exist, one of these being the business culture. A subculture can be described as:

*A social group with shared characteristics that distinguish it in some way from the larger cultural group or society in which it is embedded. Generally, a subculture is distinguished either by a unifying set of ideas and/or practices (such as the corporate culture or the drug culture).*²¹

Subcultures exist within a *mother culture* and have certain characteristics which can only be understood in relation to this mother culture.

Danish professor Finn Collin speaks of three different types of subcultures; *intensive subcultures*, *orthogonal subcultures* and *countercultures*.²² The first mentioned shares the core culture values with the mother culture, but intensifies the layers of the manifest culture.

Countercultures clash with the core culture layers of the mother culture. An example hereof is criminal subcultures.

Orthogonal subcultures exist in a larger culture and share the overall system of belief, but maintain a unique purpose and self-image, and create norms, codes and styles to reflect this uniqueness.²³

An example hereof is the business culture which we, as mentioned, are focusing on in this report. A person can be a part of several subcultures at a time as they overlap in several areas.

As mentioned earlier in this section we have chosen to approach the study of Chinese and Danish business culture through the social segment and the conveyance segment in the horizontal culture dimension. Through these two segments that are comparable with the layers in the manifest culture, we endeavour to obtain an understanding of the deeper core culture values, seeing the visible and

²¹ Cushner: 2003

²² Collin in Gullestrup: 2003, p. 168

²³ Dodd: 1987

tangible layers as symbols or reflections of the fundamental world view of a culture. We realize that field research and analysis of the core culture layers would be preferable in order to acquire a profound understanding of the two subcultures, but given the time frame and our limited resources, this is not possible. Through the theory of Gullestrup's horizontal dimension and the layers of the manifest culture, we are able to establish a confined and specific view of a part of a culture, and are aware of the fact that this does not provide us with definitive answers.

As Gullestrup emphasized in our conversation with him, it is important, in order to understand different cultures, to thoroughly understand your own culture. This means recognize that the way you see other cultures, and your chosen study approach, is inevitably affected by your cultural background.

Gullestrup has captured this mechanism in his term *objectified inter-subjectivity*. He uses it to describe how shared values, ideas and opinions among members of a culture over time transform from being subjective notions into becoming objective values of more or less universal truths within this specific culture and society. In other words the subjective ideas and values of the members become objective through the common conscience of the culture.

When approaching other cultures than your own, you need to be aware of not only the objectified inter-subjectivity of your own culture, but also that of a foreign culture in order for the communication to be successful.²⁴ However, regardless of your level of awareness of the objectified inter-subjectivity of both your own and the counterpart culture, Gullestrup emphasizes that any assumption is subjective. This should always be kept in mind when dealing with other cultures in general.

When combining this knowledge with the cultural analysis model, it becomes obvious that your behaviour reflects the core values of *your* culture, and your view and experiences of a different culture forces you to unconsciously compare the foreign culture with your own, because it is your basis of knowledge, and because of your *pre-understanding* and *horizon* as described by German Philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer. Gadamer argues that *when two people communicate (either face to face or in print), they both approach the text (oral or written) with a particular pre-*

²⁴ Gullestrup: 2003

*understanding of what is about to come [...] These pre-understandings originate from an experience with similar communicative events.*²⁵

This means that when communicating with a person from another culture, it is necessary to keep in mind that you may have very different ideas of what to expect from your counterpart and the communication between the two of you. Being aware of this helps you deal with similar situations later on in your life, but this experience is of course not applicable in every type of situation. You might have to adapt these pre-understandings as you go along and embrace the new information or experience.²⁶

We are only able to get to a certain point with our pre-understandings as they are limited by our horizon, i.e. our ideology. *Each individual contains his or her personal horizon which helps us add meaning to what we experience [...].*²⁷

The way we speak of something – the discourse – is reflected by our knowledge and idea of the subject, as our attitude towards the matter becomes visible in communication. The horizon is a product of our culture, and as such changeable. What is important is to try to understand each others *interpretive framework* when communicating, i.e. the culturally defined basis of interpreting.²⁸

Having accounted for the theory of Gullestrup, we will now proceed with business culture.

3.2 Business culture

As emphasized in the last section, culture exists on many levels – from national culture on a more broad scale, to much more specific subcultures with borders made up by different groupings in society.

Using Gullestrup's ideas as the basic cultural foundation of this report, we will add a small and carefully selected range of more pragmatic cultural analysis tools by other scholars to delve further into encapsulating business culture.

²⁵ Askehave: 2005, p. 11

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 12

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 14

²⁸ *ibid.*

As a starting point it is important to keep in mind that intercultural awareness focuses on adapting to another culture, especially in a business context. Diplomacy will get you far, in the words of Victor, who states that *the best way for people from two countries to conduct business is to examine the differences and similarities between their nations.*²⁹ Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner agree, as they believe that *cultural dilemmas need to be reconciled in a process of understanding the advantages of each cultural preference.*³⁰ So by adaptation is meant that one should not change oneself, but rather adapt the message to accommodate the culture for which it is intended. In other words, *transcultural effectiveness is not measured only by the degree to which you are able to grasp the opposite value. It is measured by your competence in reconciling the dilemmas, i.e., the degree to which you are able to make both values work together [...].*³¹

So how do you adapt your message? You do so by thoroughly acquiring knowledge on the specific features of the subculture you are trying to penetrate. In order to systematically uncover the way to do that, we will divide the business culture section into two parts; starting with a general introduction to the mechanics of international business culture, followed by an account of the specific dimensions (tools) that we will use to analyse the business subcultures in China and Denmark.

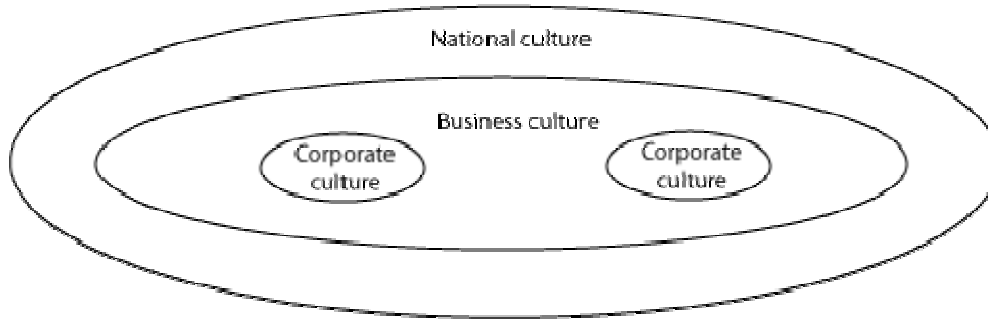
An even more accurate way of adapting is to go one step deeper. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, among others, talk about subcultures within subcultures, and promote the idea of distinguishing corporate cultures from each other. In other words, looking individually at a company's particular internal culture and treating this as a sub-subculture in itself. A smaller subculture with its own characteristics, within the characteristics of business subculture: *The way in which attitudes are expressed within a specific organisation is described as a corporate or organisational culture.*³² We have worked out the following model that visualizes the three levels of culture, business culture and corporate culture:

²⁹ Victor: 1992, p. 3

³⁰ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 33

³¹ *ibid.* p. 46

³² *ibid.* p. 7



The corporate culture notion will be described thoroughly later in this section.

3.2.1 Business culture in general

Although having established that the ability to adapt is a key notion in business culture, we do have a more specific point of origin for our particular study of the business subculture. In contrast to many other interactions between two different subcultures, the international business cultures are bound together by the mutual *concern of [...] transference, in the workplace, of one participant's message to another to facilitate standard business functions.*³³ As such, we know that the sender and receiver in theory share the goal of fulfilling the purpose of their employment in one way or the other, i.e. standard business functions. Obviously, the purpose will be to generate profit, but that kind of reasoning comes from seeing through objectified inter-subjectivity of our own culture (as described earlier³⁴). Other cultures may have more subtle priorities than mere earnings when engaging in creating a professional business relationship.

The challenge then is to go deeper into the cultural abyss of each participant, in order to unveil the specific purpose of their employment. In other words, to find out what your opponent sees as a success.

Realizing your counterparts' priorities and purpose will make it easier to adapt your message to their culture and to accommodate their needs – thus presenting your own message in the most efficient communicative way. Gesteland puts it more bluntly: *Iron Rule No. 1: In international business, the Seller adapts to the Buyer.*³⁵

³³ Victor: 1992, p. 1

³⁴ Cf. chapter 3.1.2

³⁵ Gesteland: 2005, p. 17

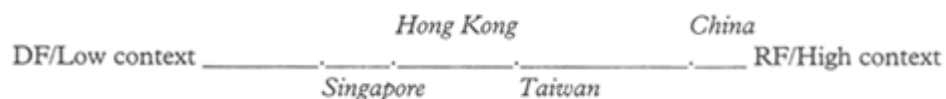
3.2.2 Cultural dimensions

To use Gullestrups theories in practice, we will use cultural dimensions as tools.

The idea of using dimensions as a measure is used by many of the leading theorists within cross-cultural studies; among others are Hofstede, Gesteland, Trompenaars, Hall, Spencer-Oatey and many more.

Basically, a dimension is a scale measuring between two opposite values, where a culture – depending on its characteristics – will be given a score somewhere on the spectrum. A score that will reveal which of the opposites they are closest to and create the basis for a comparison.

An example:



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Although this is a valid basis for comparison, we are aware of the shortcomings of using the dimension idea. Professor Brendan McSweeney, University of Essex, criticises Hofstede's analysis method in his paper *Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and Their Consequences: A triumph of faith - A failure of analysis*. One of his main points, charging bi-polar dimensional measurements and thereby not only Hofstede, but also the other scholars using dimensions, points out the problems of depicting dimensions of *national culture as bi-polar in the sense that each is composed of contrasting positions, for instance 'individualism' versus 'collectivism'*³⁷ is that *the two can coexist and are simply emphasised, more or less, depending on the situation*.³⁸

It is our judgement, however, that in order to make any tangible foundation for comparison, a certain amount of generalization must take place. David J. Hickson, Professor of International Management and Organization at the University of Bradford Management Centre, supports this idea by saying that *Hofstede had frail data, but robust concepts*.³⁹ Based on this assessment, we have chosen bi-polar dimensional measuring in this report.

³⁶ Gesteland: 2005, p. 41

³⁷ McSweeney: 2002

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Hickson: 1996, pp. 217-228

We especially find Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's ideas very compatible with Gullestrup, since they emphasize the connection between the core values and the visible values (Gullestrup deals with the visual values in his horizontal dimension and in the manifest layers of the vertical dimension⁴⁰). In a research paper, Dahl emphasizes Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's focus on the connection between core and visible culture:

In their view, culture is made up of basic assumptions at the core level. These basic assumptions are somewhat similar to 'values' in the Hofstede model,⁴¹ a lower level of values, i.e. basic assumptions are the absolute core values that influence the more visible values in the layer above.⁴²

Out of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven dimensions; universalism vs. particularism, communitarianism vs. individualism, neutral vs. emotional, diffuse vs. specific, achievement vs. ascription, human-time relationship, human-nature relationship, we have chosen the following two, that we find applicable for composing an initial e-mail proposal.⁴³

Arguably, more of the remaining dimensions could be relevant as well, as the dimensions tie together, but to keep a clear leitmotif in this report, we will concentrate on the following two, which we find the most appropriate:

Specific vs. diffuse cultures

In societies where specific relationships are the common way of getting acquainted, people have different roles in different contexts. A person can have a special status at work, but a very different one after closing time since business roles are somewhat eradicated outside the company.

Contrary to this, diffuse relationship-based societies focus more on the overall status of others and feel that *everything is connected to everything*.⁴⁴ Business can easily be taken care of during leisure time, and in some diffuse business cultures, participants *refuse to do business in a mental subdivision called "commerce" or "work"*.⁴⁵ Leisure and business activities are instead conducted with a certain amount of interdependence.

⁴⁰ Cf. chapter 3.1.1

⁴¹ Cf. chapter 3.1.1

⁴² Dahl: 2004, p. 5

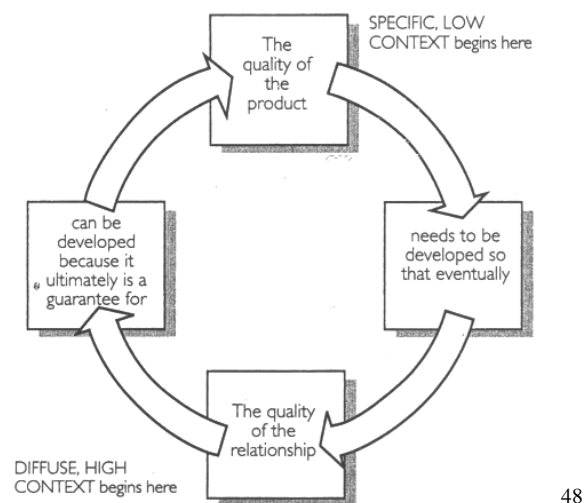
⁴³ Trompenaars: 1998

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 89

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner acknowledge that *doing business with a culture more diffuse than your own feels very timeconsuming*.⁴⁶

This dimension binds very closely with Hall's *high vs. low context culture* theory which we will elaborate on later herein.⁴⁷ Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner present the specific-diffuse circle to illustrate the combination of these two dimensions:



This specific-diffuse dimension links very closely with both the dimensions which we will describe next; achievement vs. ascription, but also Gesteland's 'deal-focus vs. relationship focus' dimension, as described later herein.⁴⁹

Achievement vs. ascription cultures

*Some societies accord status to people on the basis of their achievements, others ascribe it to them by virtue of age, class, gender, education, and so on.*⁵⁰ In other words, ascription-based cultures usually have a high focus on the permanent attributes, with leaders often being middle-aged males with inherited qualifications, whereas achievement-based societies are strictly opposite, making achievements and successes the only legitimate source of status.

⁴⁶ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 89

⁴⁷ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁴⁸ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 93

⁴⁹ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁵⁰ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 105

In practice, this means that when making contact with an ascriptive culture, you may experience dealing with a highly esteemed, yet - in the specific matter - incompetent person.

Oppositely, making contact with a company in an achievement-based culture will initially set you in correspondence with a competent business partner, regardless of his or her status in the organisation and definitely regardless of age and background.

Although Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner cover a great deal of the elements we need for our analysis tool, we find a few elements of Gesteland's *Patterns of Cross-Cultural Business Behaviour* equally appropriate for the purpose of this report. From his literature we will add these three dimensions:

Deal-focus vs. relationship focus

Not all cultures see profit as the only successful outcome of a business deal. Establishing a lasting relationship is known to rank very high on the agenda of some business associates when entering into correspondence. Distinguishing between deal-focused (DF) and relationship focused (RF) cultures basically boils down to the fact that in the latter, people tend to be hesitant towards doing business with strangers. As a result, when approaching a relationship-based culture through cold calling (sending an uninvited proposal), it is always a good idea to comply with this notion in one way or the other. While most options in this case are interpersonal face-to-face notions and therefore irrelevant for this report, one way for written enquiries to get around this cultural feature, is the usage of a third-party introduction. The third party should be highly esteemed in the country of the potential business partner you are addressing. Examples of such would be embassy officials, trade union associates or even just highly esteemed friends or business contacts who are willing to vouch for you.

In deal-focused markets you can usually get down to business after just a few minutes of small talk. And you can learn most of what you need to know about your potential DF counterpart in a matter of days rather than the weeks or months it may take in strongly

*RF cultures such as China and Saudi Arabia.*⁵¹

Direct vs. indirect language culture

Referring strongly to the dimension above, it is a rule of thumb that deal-focused cultures usually prefer direct language, whereas relationship-based cultures use indirect language. In Gesteland's opinion, *this communication gap is the greatest single cause of misunderstanding between RF and DF business people around the world. Confusion arises because people from the two cultures expect quite different things from the communication process.*⁵² Where the DF business person wants to appear easily understandable by expressing himself clearly, the RF business person prioritizes maintaining harmony, even though it may clog his message.

Gesteland uses this example to explain the connection between DF/RF cultures and their usage of direct/indirect language:

*Even when indirect RF and direct DF people are both speaking the same language, English for example, they are really speaking different languages. A Dutch or German negotiator will choose his words carefully so that his counterparts will understand exactly what he is saying. He wants no ambiguity, no beating around the bush. Meanwhile his Arab, Japanese or Indonesian counterparts are choosing their words even more carefully, but for a quite different reason. RF negotiators want to make sure that no one at the meeting will be offended. They want no rude directness, no crude bluntness, no loss of face.*⁵³

The use of direct and indirect language ties very closely with Hall's high vs. low context theories, which we will describe later in this section.⁵⁴

Formal vs. informal culture

Relating very closely to the achievement vs. ascription dimension accounted for earlier herein, *formal cultures tend to be organized in hierarchies reflecting major differences*

⁵¹ Gesteland: 2005, p. 29

⁵² *ibid.* p. 35

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 44

⁵⁴ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

*in status and power, while informal cultures value egalitarian attitudes with smaller differences in status and power.*⁵⁵

And Gesteland continues: *Formality is about status, hierarchies, power and respect. Whereas informal cultures are supposed to value status equality, formal cultures value hierarchies and status differences.*⁵⁶

In summary, it is important, when coming from an informal culture, to distinguish between the status and title of a formal culture counterpart. This requires research on both the culture of the country you are addressing, but also on the specific corporate culture of the company to which you are sending your proposal.

A problem often occurring is that *international sales people from informal cultures often do not know how to show respect to high-ranking persons from formal cultures who may be offended by perceived slights.*⁵⁷ As such, one should not underestimate the importance of this notion, and therefore make sure to use not only the linguistic, communicative and titular formalities, but be aware of how the receiver will be expected to decode the message, as described in our chapter on culture in general, as well as later in the communication chapter.⁵⁸

Another specific dimension we would like to add is that of Hofstede's *uncertainty avoidance*, which is a dominant and well-acknowledged idea in many cross-cultural theories. Acknowledged Danish scholar, Verner Worm, whose work we use several extracts from, are among those scholars including this dimension in his patch-work cross-cultural tool.⁵⁹

Uncertainty avoidance

*Uncertainty about the future is a basic fact of human life with which we try to cope,*⁶⁰ and as such, uncertainty avoidance is *the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.*⁶¹

Basically, all humans will try to avoid being uncertain about things that will potentially

⁵⁵ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁵⁶ Gesteland: 2005, p. 47

⁵⁷ Cf. chapter 5.2

⁵⁸ Cf. chapter 4.1

⁵⁹ Worm: 1997

⁶⁰ Hofstede: 1984, p. 110

⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 113

make them feel threatened or even uncomfortable i.e. this is a part of the universal program and our core culture values. What can be measured is how these values are expressed, as this differs from culture to culture: *Different societies have adapted to uncertainty in different ways. These ways not only differ between traditional and modern societies, but even among modern societies. Ways of coping with uncertainty belong to the cultural heritage of societies. [...] They are reflected in collectively held values of the members of a particular society.*⁶² Collectively held perceptions are, naturally, mirrored in society's businesses. H.K. Downey, another scholar on cross-cultural studies, who Hofstede quotes on a couple of occasions, narrows it down by saying that *if different societies deal with uncertainty in different ways, this should effect the ways in which they build organisations that react to uncertainty.*⁶³ By organisations is also meant businesses.

The kind of uncertainty businesses may face is exemplified by Hofstede in the following: *The case of uncertainty is often linked to the concept of environment; the "environment" which usually is taken to include everything not under direct control of the organization is a source of uncertainty for which the organization tries to compensate.*⁶⁴

A natural part of the environment in this definition is of course current and potential business partners, the latter of whom you would naturally put focus on minimizing uncertainty with, in order to put yourself in the best possible situation to negotiate a lucrative outcome of a trade agreement. Examples of reducing your recipients' uncertainty avoidance could include customizing your message to his or her cultural traits or making a thorough introduction of yourself in order to mitigate prejudice on their part.

Last, but not least, we will include Hall's high vs. low context culture dimension:

High vs. low context cultures

Hall is a strong advocate of focusing on what he refers to as high and low context cultures differences. That being a very essential concept to communication in general,

⁶² Hofstede: 1984, p. 111

⁶³ Downey in Hofstede: 1984, p. 114

⁶⁴ Hofstede: 1984, p. 112

we will first of all establish the basic idea about this notion, which – as a result – will also be touched in our communication theory chapter.⁶⁵

To describe the communicative importance of context, Hall states that:

*Regardless of where one looks, one discovers that a universal feature of information systems is that meaning (what the receiver is expected to do) is made up of: the communication, the background and preprogrammed responses of the recipient, and the situation. [...] Therefore, what the receiver actually perceives is important in understanding the nature of context. Remember that what an organism perceives is influenced in four ways – by status, activity, setting, and experience. But in man one must add another crucial dimension: culture.*⁶⁶

Having established that, we will then move on to explaining how this context-notion is reflected in communication (this is what Gullestrup describes as a manifest layer):

*High context transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low context transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context.*⁶⁷

Gesteland simplifies the notion by using the terms *implicit* and *explicit*: *When [low context culture business persons] speak, the meaning is usually explicit. That is, the meaning is contained in the words themselves.*⁶⁸ Contrary to this, a message from a member of a high context business culture will have many more implicit elements, and rely much more on the context. The context can be set by the relationship for instance.⁶⁹ That is why high context cultures give such high priority to creating a relationship before engaging in actual business negotiations.

To further elaborate on this, Hall uses the following example:

⁶⁵ Cf. chapter 4.1

⁶⁶ Hall: 1976, p. 101

⁶⁷ Dahl: 2004, p. 10

⁶⁸ Gesteland: 2005, pp. 40-41

⁶⁹ Cf. chapter 6.1

People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something that they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what's bothering him, so that he doesn't have to be specific. The result is that he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly – this keystone – is the role of his interlocutor. To do this for him is an insult and a violation of his individuality.⁷⁰

Although a very generic example, such a situation can also be transferred into a business situation, meaning that a high context culture member will *beat about the bush* until his counterpart acknowledges the meaning of the message. This can prove very difficult, especially if the counterpart is from a low context culture, where this kind of behaviour is very unusual. So to be able to interpret high context communication, one must either be ready to engage in a closer relationship (to obtain knowledge about the necessary context, which is sometime highly personal) or equip oneself with comprehensive background information on the counterpart.

In general, high-context communication, in contrast to low-context communication, is economical, fast, efficient, and satisfying; however, time must be devoted to programming. If this programming does not take place, the communication is incomplete.⁷¹ By programming, Hall means establishing the relationship that sets the context.

3.2.3 Accounting for corporate culture

As mentioned previously, subcultures can also be found inside a subculture, and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner focuses strongly on one of these; namely corporate culture. The idea is that a company can have its own particular culture inside its four walls, although also overall being a part of the business culture that surrounds it.

⁷⁰ Hall: 1976, p. 113

⁷¹ *ibid.* p. 101

To characterize corporate culture, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner have set up three aspects to where any analysis should put its focus:⁷²

1. The general relationship between employees and their organization.
2. The vertical or hierarchical system of authority defining superiors and subordinates.
3. The general views of employees about the organization's destiny, purpose and goals and their places in this.

How do we do that? Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner answer this question by using a systematic approach. They have developed a two-dimensional matrix, where the one-dimensional scales we have dealt with so far – *deal vs. relationship-focused cultures* for example – are combined, giving us a tool that enables us to precisely categorise a company's corporate culture within the four main types that exist:

- The family
- The Eiffel Tower
- The guided missile
- The incubator

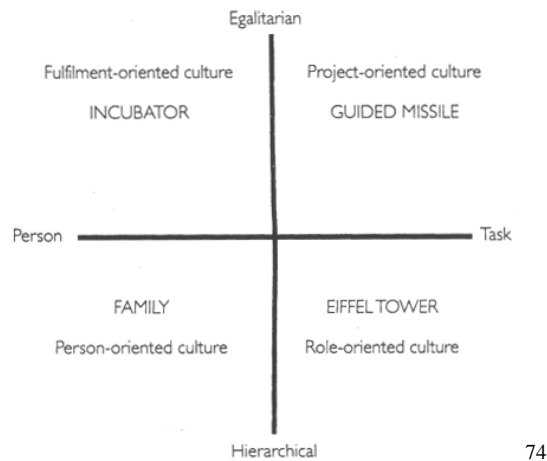
Each of these groupings has separate characteristics, whose main distinctions will be described later herein. It is these distinctions that make such a separation valuable in an analysis process. Although these four main corporate culture types must be considered to be overall ideal types that actually mix and overlap to some extent, one of them will always be dominating. It is the knowledge of the receiver's corporate culture type that enables the sender to customize the message into the most efficient proposal.

*This separation [...] is useful for exploring the basis of each type in terms of how employees learn, change, resolve conflicts, reward, motivate and so on,*⁷³ and as such, will give the sender an idea of the receiver's personality.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner have juxtaposed two dimensions in the following diagram:

⁷² Trompenaars: 1998, p. 162

⁷³ *ibid.*



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The vertical axis (egalitarian vs. hierarchical) is based on a combination of our account of formal vs. informal cultures⁷⁵ and achievement vs. ascription cultures⁷⁶ (the importance of status and thereby hierarchy), whereas the horizontal axis (person vs. task) equals our deal-focused vs. relationship-focused culture account.⁷⁷

Basically, what you do is find out how the company rates on the dimension-scales mentioned above, and then plot this into the diagram. The point where the ratings cross will indicate in which one of the four groupings the company belongs. Then, use this finding to gain knowledge of the company from the following character-description:

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turners corporate culture characteristics:⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 163

⁷⁵ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁷⁶ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁷⁷ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

⁷⁸ Trompenaars: 1998, p. 183

	Family	Eiffel Tower	Guided missile	Incubator
Relationships between employees	Diffuse relationships to organic whole to which one is bonded.	Specific role in mechanical system of required interactions.	Specific tasks in cybernetic system targeted upon shared objectives.	Diffuse, spontaneous growing out of shared creative process.
Attitude to authority	Status is ascribed to parent figures who are close and powerful.	Status is ascribed to superior roles who are distant yet powerful.	Status is achieved by project group members who contribute to targeted goal.	Status is achieved by individuals exemplifying creativity and growth.
Ways of thinking and learning	Intuitive, holistic, lateral and error-correcting.	Logical, analytical, vertical and rationally efficient.	Problem-centred, professional, practical, cross-disciplinary.	Process-oriented, creative, ad hoc, inspirational.
Attitudes to people	Family members.	Human resources.	Specialists and experts.	Co-creators.
Ways of changing	“Father” changes course.	Change rules and procedures.	Shift aim as target moves.	Improvise and attune.
Ways of motivating and rewarding	Intrinsic satisfaction in being loved and respected. Management by subjectives.	Promotion to greater position, larger role. Management by job description.	Pay or credit for performance and problems solved. Management by objectives.	Participating in the process of creating new realities. Management by enthusiasm.
Criticism and conflict resolution	Turn other cheek, save other’s face, do not lose power game.	Criticism is accusation of irrationality unless there are procedures to arbitrate conflicts.	Constructive task-related only, then admit error and correct fast.	Must improve creative idea, not negate it.

Being aware of these basic characteristics will give a general idea of the company you are approaching as well as the mentality of the employees. In other words, it shows the general corporate culture.

4. Communication theory

Interpersonal communication over the Internet, called computer-mediated communication, is blooming. The worldwide number of Internet users surpassed one billion in 2005, with China having the second-largest amount of users.⁷⁹ The prime example of computer-mediated communications is the e-mail, which we will take a closer look at in this chapter. We will address some of the most important factors to consider when writing business letters in the e-mail format. Our overall goal is to develop an understanding and a strategy of how e-mail can be used to mitigate the impact of culturally induced misunderstandings.

At first, we will go through the most influential elements in the e-mail context – how to classify the communication situation, audience analysis, the characteristics of the medium etc. Afterwards, we will go through some of the rhetorical and linguistic tools that can be employed in the actual composition of an e-mail.

4.1 The communication model

To form a general idea of the elements essential in a communication situation, when corresponding via e-mail, we will set up a model of communication. We have chosen to compose a model based on the transmission paradigm. This contains the basic communicative elements in the one-way transmission of a message. We have chosen to use it here since the elements in the model influence the composition of the message.⁸⁰

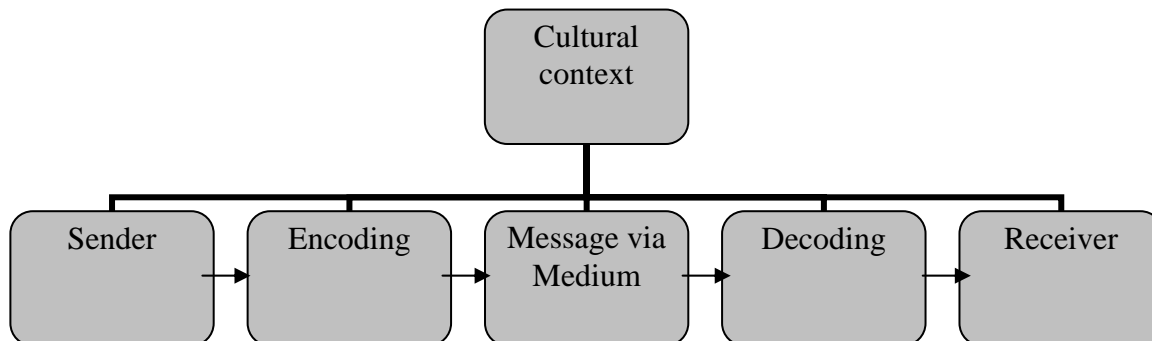
It is a relatively simple model, and this choice is very deliberate. Although one could argue that the model is too simple, leaving out important nuances, we rather find the simplicity to be an advantage. The simplicity is good for breaking down the process into the very basic and most important elements of communication – the only elements applicable for a low-context, non-interpersonal medium such as e-mail.

The elements most relevant to us are *sender*, *receiver*, *medium* and *code*. There are of course many other elements influencing the situation, which we will not cover here – since most of these are

⁷⁹ Computer Industry Almanac Inc.: 2006

⁸⁰ Frandsen et al.: 2002B, pp. 68-76

described above in the section on culture. The cultural context permeates the whole communication process:



The sender is the communicator responsible for the production of the specific type of communication, and the receiver is the communicator responsible for the reception and interpretation of the message in question.

The medium or channel is the specific way of transmitting this message, in this case correspondence by e-mail, and the code is the culturally defined set of rules that determine exactly how we compose signs and symbols when communicating.⁸¹

These pivotal elements in the communication model will be addressed more thoroughly below.

Sender

It is important to realize that the e-mail sender and receiver may have completely different ways of communicating due to cultural backgrounds etc., i.e. the *context* which encapsulates the production and the reception of the message.

As described in the chapter on Gullestrup, every culture has an objectified inter-subjectivity that affects the way we see our own and other cultures, and it is necessary to attempt, through the subjectivity of your own eyes, to understand how people from a different culture think and interpret, and perhaps what they expect from you in a communication situation.

In encoding the message and choosing the medium, the sender has made some conscious and subconscious choices based on his own social and professional perception of his or her identity.

⁸¹ Frandsen et al.: 2002A, pp. 52-57

This affects the message and how it is perceived by the recipient. We will elaborate further on how to mould the image the sender portrays. This is achieved using various communicative tools, which are detailed later in the analysis section.

Receiver

One of the basic rules in e-mail communication is considering who your receiver is. This is done in order to avoid misunderstandings and offending your recipients. What is their cultural background? In what way would my audience perceive the e-mail I am writing?

When concerning business netiquette (coined from the term *internet etiquette*), Pearce suggests the following test: *The SIMPLE TEST* is: “*How would I feel in these circumstances, if I received this message.*”⁸²

This is indeed a *simple* test considering what we discovered about one’s cultural background according to Gullestrup’s theories. There is more to it than that. In order to mitigate the misunderstandings that can arise due to cultural differences, one must seek insight into the culture and circumstances of the audience. The sender should aim to decipher the system of codes the receiver uses in everyday correspondence, and, in his own manner, use these to create a platform of mutual understanding in the correspondence. This may turn out to be a set of intertwining codes from various levels; this being social codes, business specific codes, national codes or even universal codes.⁸³

McMurrey suggests keeping target audience analysis in mind when composing e-mails. Since the receiver is not there when writing the e-mail, the sender should research the receiver using all channels available (Google, company web site, business connections etc.). When writing the e-mail, the sender must then mentally visualize the receiver in his head and imagine the receiver’s actual situation when reading it. Though it may seem a bit on the strange side, McMurrey informs this strategy of getting the mental perspective of one’s receiver actually works: *As they write and as they review and revise, successful writers carry on a much more active, more detailed dialog with those imaginary readers.*⁸⁴

⁸² Pearce: 1999

⁸³ Frandsen et al.: 2002B, pp. 91-95

⁸⁴ McMurrey: 2002, p. 309

The cultural dimensions listed and elaborate on in the culture section may be used to classify and thereby clarify the receiver's cultural background. It is important to achieve insight into the recipient's corporate culture, which is done via a cultural analysis of the receiver's situational context. We will utilize these dimensions later to learn more about the culture(s) in the analysis section.

Medium

E-mail is considered a very lean medium. All non-verbal and extra-linguistic context cues⁸⁵ are removed from the communication channel, thus making the interactions more impersonalised and task-oriented.⁸⁶ There are no facial expressions, physical appearances, kinetics, smells or proxemic issues to interfere with the message itself, which actively reduces the uncertainty factors in the communication process.

Shachaf comments on the leanness of the e-mail by writing that it *mitigates miscommunication due to verbal differences [...] and eliminates nonverbal differences*.⁸⁷ Considering what we have learned from our own experience abroad, as well as from the interviews conducted with our respondents, it seems that the overwhelming majority of Chinese business men are somewhat difficult to understand due to their accents. Therefore, the leanness of the e-mail medium is actually helpful, since it diminishes the risk of misunderstandings occurring due to accents being hard to understand. The lack of social and non-verbal cues forces the recipient to interpret the correspondence literally. In this manner, what initially seems to be limitations of the e-mail medium transforms and becomes beneficial, actively reducing miscommunications due to cultural diversity.⁸⁸

On the other hand, reducing social contextual cues easily leads to status equalisation between correspondents. In connection with Danish-Chinese communication, where the Chinese recipient

⁸⁵ Non-verbal and extra-linguistic context cues are the elements of the communication situation which are particular to face-to-face communication and are not appearing in or influencing the e-mail correspondence. Examples are intonation, pauses and facial expressions. Since we work with the e-mail genre, these are not relevant to us.

⁸⁶ Shachaf: 2004

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

would object to losing status in any shape, way or form, it would be wise to address this aspect of the e-mail medium, and make sure that the status (and following harmony) remains undisturbed.

E-mail is often used in conjunction with the phone or some kind of instant messaging agent, such as MSN Messenger or ICQ. This approach offers a wider perspective of the recipient. In this context, Shachaf comments a study on electronic communications channels, which says that e-mail is *the basic channel for communication but was used primarily for information sharing and not for relationship building, which was primarily supported by telephone exchange.*⁸⁹ However, especially when dealing with China, it may be most advantageous to keep the communication in writing due to the abovementioned disruptive factor coming from accents, but also because written communication offers much better legal evidence – should conflicts arise. The opportunities the e-mail medium affords to the sender to ease the decoding should be exploited:

*Decoding is easier because one can rehearse before sending a message by using spell checkers and going over the message before it is transmitted. Email also provides the ability to rehearse and improve the accuracy of the message for native or non-native speakers.*⁹⁰

We will also look into how e-mails business letters differ from traditional written business letters. *The Business Netiquette International* website does not differentiate between e-mail communication and traditional paper-based letters: *Communicating by e-mail is no different from writing on your company letterhead. A business communication is business, period.*⁹¹

This is a very stereotypical way of looking at business communication.

Benzie suggests that e-mail *has become accepted as a neutral medium and its limitations glossed over as irritations rather than analysed in order to improve communication. This tendency to 'take it for granted' can lead to an underestimation of the effect that misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication might have on relationships.*⁹²

This tendency to see e-mail as identical to the traditional mail genre is highly unprofitable. Instead one should aim to exploit its potential. Examples of the potentials of the e-mail genre are: Low cost-

⁸⁹ Shachaf: 2004

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Pearce: 1999

⁹² Benzie: 2005

effectiveness, the ability to store large amounts of data easily and systematically, the ability to quote others easily by copying and pasting, and the ability to send to many recipients at a time.

E-mails may appear more informal and insincere compared to traditional mail because of their leaner appearance. But, as mentioned, e-mail does have many significant advantages compared to traditional mail.

E-mail is a very fast and low-cost medium. This means that they often centre on only one or two main topics per message, due to the fast dialogical nature of the medium. But beware – e-mail encourages immediacy and the dialogical spontaneity may result in lack of consideration for the recipient, which can potentially lead to an unsuccessful proposal. As Benzie comments, this can become an advantage for the non-native English speaker, since *there is time to craft the message and correct mistakes before sending, it is a 'safer' channel.*⁹³

The fact that e-mails are wired almost instantaneously from sender to receiver lends new opportunities to the communicators. *Because the turnaround time can be so fast, email is more conversational than traditional paper-based media.*⁹⁴ The recipient has the opportunity to ask you to elaborate your proposal immediately. This, however, does not mean that you should not strive to write effectively and clearly, especially in the business genre. Even though e-mail is a fast media, the recipient should be allowed time to receive and reply to the proposal. Many business men receive an abundance of correspondence every day – and furthermore, when writing to China on the other side of the world, you should consider the time difference. Slow response time could also be attributed to technological problems with the software or the Internet rather than the communicator.⁹⁵

One of the intrinsic characteristic of the e-mail technology, the hyperlink, offers a new potential to consider when writing e-mails. Certain terms, which have a deeper contextual meaning, may be explained further in an on-line text outside the e-mail:

⁹³ Benzie: 2005

⁹⁴ Sherwood: 2001

⁹⁵ Shachaf: 2004

*For example, a U.S. American (of European descent) may see in their e-mail from a person from China that the word family is hyperlinked. If the reader chooses, they could click on the hyperlinked word family and then they would be taken to a document that explains the concept of family in China (e.g., importance of the extended family, background on Confucian beliefs about family structure, etc.).*⁹⁶

But would such new measures be well received in the formal settings of business e-mails? Already, many businesses are referencing to other business partners or successfully conducted projects in order to boost their personal appeal. Certainly, the possibility of hyperlinked background information could help reduce culturally induced misunderstandings.

The influence of one's cultural background on the linguistic styles, and thereby how e-mails are put together, will be one of the main subjects discussed in our analysis below.

For example, how different cultures use e-mail communication styles is in part affected by their aforementioned status when it comes to high and low context. As an example, Hart mentions that: *High-context cultures such as the Japanese culture would seem to have a "handicap" in the low-context, nonverbal deficient world of computer-mediated communication (specifically text-based e-mail).*⁹⁷

Does this lead to high-context cultures, such as the Chinese, writing much information implicitly and in between the lines in e-mail correspondence? We will examine this further in the comparative analysis chapter.

Codes

As described above, different cultures have different codes for their communication. These become apparent in the coding and decoding phases of intercultural communication. The language in itself is a code, and therefore all the variations of the language are significant in the communication between cultures. Our focus is solely in the verbal, linguistic dimensions of the codes, not the non-verbal codes, which are important in face-to-face interaction.

Danish and Chinese codes of communication are very far apart, and the underlying cultural values that shape these codes have been addressed in the culture section. Therefore, we will not elaborate further on codes in this chapter.

⁹⁶ Hart: 1998

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

5. Linguistic theory

In today's business world, English is no longer viewed as a foreign language - it is the global means of communication in many parts of the world. Even though English is not the official language in many countries, it is considered a *global language* or a relatively neutral *lingua franca*, as it has a special status in more than 100 countries worldwide. English is the most commonly taught second language around the world, and therefore *some linguists believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural emblem of 'native English speakers', but rather a language that is absorbing aspects of cultures world-wide as it grows in use.*⁹⁸

One of our respondents remarked that the Chinese level of English skills compared to the Danish level is *lower, but sufficient enough. Often their written English skills are better than their oral ones – but still – a lower level can be expected. But in such a case – a translator would be brought in by the company.*⁹⁹

Another respondent told us that it is a government priority to heighten the level of English skills in the country in order to avoid stagnation of growth.¹⁰⁰

Compared to English, Chinese is rarely used as a *lingua franca* outside China by non-ethnic Chinese - not even in China's bordering countries (e.g. Mongolia, South Korea, and Malaysia) where large Chinese minorities live. They are given to use English as a commercial and educational language.¹⁰¹

Like etiquette is a crucial factor in traditional written business letters, netiquette is of same importance to business e-mail messages. The motto "think before you post" is considered the most important rule of netiquette and should be taken literally.¹⁰² Examples of netiquette rules are:

- Ordinary courtesy – *do not let the instantaneous quality of e-mail negate your need to be calm, cool, deliberate, and professional.*¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Wikipedia: 2006A

⁹⁹ Cf. appendix 6

¹⁰⁰ Cf. appendix 4

¹⁰¹ Wikipedia: 2006A

¹⁰² Crystal: 2001, p. 71

- Avoid negative correspondence (angry e-mail messages) – *because of its quick turnaround abilities, e-mail can lead to negative correspondence called flaming.*¹⁰⁴

Even though the netiquette rules go without saying they should indeed be practiced. In this context many general, cultural aspects play a part, and these are to be followed consistently.¹⁰⁵

When dealing with language as such there are several dimensions to be aware of. As with the cultural subcategories, language can also be defined through several overlapping categories. It is usually a distinction between the national language, including common language and the language for special purposes (divided into several *sublanguages*). As examples of special purpose languages are financial, technical, legal, and in our case, business language.¹⁰⁶ Since we in our case focus exclusively on one specific trade, namely mobile software, we will not delve further into the other language categories.

Especially within this trade - information technology - the development of the special purpose language is so rapid that new English words, abbreviations and jargons proliferate on a daily basis. However, as a rule of thumb, it is always recommended to explain or even avoid a technical term if it is uncertain whether the recipient will understand the term or not. The reason of course being, that this might give occasion for translation problems.¹⁰⁷

5.1 Rhetoric tools

5.1.1 Appeals of argument

When composing e-mails various types of sentences and paragraphs are used to achieve communicative goals. As we will see in the next chapter on move structures, the composition of e-mails, especially the order in which the various paragraphs (and thereby their purposes) are arranged, is essential for getting the message across. According to famous philosopher Aristotle's

¹⁰³ Gerson: 2006, p. 153

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Wikipedia 2006B

¹⁰⁶ Cancino: 2003, pp. 5-6 (Compendium, part 2)

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

classic rhetorical theory, there are three appeals of argument to consider when persuading a recipient to accept your claim.¹⁰⁸ They are:

Logical appeal (logos)

The logos approach appeals to the recipient in a rational, objective manner. The point the sender is trying to get across is presented via strong evidence, clear facts and by sticking to the subject. Logical appeals are often written in a sober, neutral language and are presented in a restrained manner. There is no beating around the bush. Although logical appeals are very clear and down-to-earth, there is a disadvantage to them as well. They may seem inflexible, leaving little room for interpretation and may come off as simply boring. Many western business letters lean heavily on the logical approach in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Emotional appeal (pathos)

The emotional approach is directed towards the recipient's feelings. The sender aims to persuade the recipient to do something by striking a chord with the stronger emotions, thus relying on the recipient's ability to empathise with an argument. The emotional appeals aim to affect the very passionate belief structures, e.g. excitement, anger, compassion, joy and envy etc. This makes most western business people regard the emotional rhetoric as very un-professional and shallow and this is why it is not very often found in business communication in those regions of the world.¹⁰⁹ This is, however, different in other parts of the world, where emotional appeal is more widely used in e.g. flattering praises in business communication.¹¹⁰

Ethical appeal (ethos)

Using the ethical appeal, the sender utilizes himself and how he is perceived as a base on which to build the proposal. The ethical appeal targets the recipient's trust in the sender and his perception of the sender's credibility. One of the ways to build an aura of believability and reliability around one's person or company is to use references from third parties who are already perceived as being credible and trustworthy (as also

¹⁰⁸ Zhu: 2005, p. 13

¹⁰⁹ Jørgensen: 2003, p. 65

¹¹⁰ Zhu: 2005

proposed earlier herein).¹¹¹ This is, e.g., used in job application letters and often when businesses venture into unknown territory. The idea is that the reliable third party's goodwill will rub off on the sender. (Much in the same way as we used our face-to-face talks with Professor Hans Gullestrup to lend further credibility to our sections on cultural analysis.)

These three ways of appealing to your audience can be used both in the very broad perspective of a text as a whole but can also be used on the particular, argumentative level. By being aware of how each and every one of the arguments will affect the way a proposal is perceived, the sender has a powerful tool when deciding how to address the target audience in the most effective manner.

All three should be present in any proposal in order to make it successful. There are, however, clear differences when moving across cultures in how these appeals are weighted individually.¹¹²

The logical appeal was seen by Aristotle as the sober argument of good quality, while the other two approaches (appealing to feelings) are seen as more unprofessional and insincere.¹¹³ This perception has somewhat changed. In business communication, the personal appeal is important especially when dealing with China, seeing as they have a much more relationship-focused culture. Furthermore, it is impossible to avoid conveying a personal image towards the recipient, since everything written says something about the sender. The trick is to be aware of how to use the personal appeals to further the cause and maximise the success rate of the proposal.

In Western correspondence, a positive personal appeal is often built through ongoing correspondence based initially on logical appeals. In Asian contexts, however, the emotional approach is often combined with the personal appeal to strengthen relationship bonds, which have a higher status in business than in the West. Based on Confucius' views on relationships, social roles and social networking patterns are seen as important. A combination of emotional approach and logical approach is thus seen as the essential elements in Chinese persuasion.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Jørgensen: 1999, pp. 62-64

¹¹² Zhu: 2005, p. 13

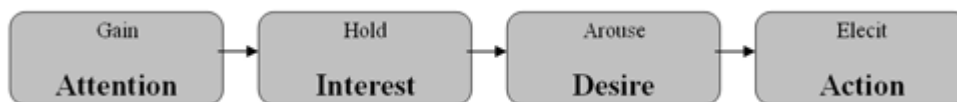
¹¹³ Jørgensen: 1999, p. 65

¹¹⁴ Zhu: 2005, p. 14

Toulmin has in his layout of argumentation theory presented the element of *qualifiers*. In presenting an argument, the qualifier can soften the claim e.g. in situations where the sender may seem unsure of the validity of his argument.¹¹⁵ We will use it in the communicative strategy guide where soliciting a response sometimes needs to be put delicately. Since the Chinese level of formality requires some *fingerspitzengefühl* in maintaining the harmony, qualifiers may be an effective tool when composing the absolute phrasings.

5.1.2 The AIDA model

Another ideal tool for designing an effective e-mail message is the AIDA model: *the message should gain attention, hold interest, arouse desire, and elicit action*.¹¹⁶ The persuasive process should go through these four steps in turn:



The purpose of the AIDA approach is to motivate the recipient to a certain response, which, in our case, means the receiver accepting the business proposal from the sender and acting favourably on it. This is done by guiding the recipient through several phases. In our analysis, we will see which kinds of appeals are used in order to obtain the goal of the AIDA model, namely persuasion and ensuing action.

Firstly, the receiver should be made aware of the proposal, i.e. the main purpose of the e-mail proposal should be presented clearly to the recipient. Secondly, the proposal should be linked to the receiver, raising and retaining interest and goading the receiver to act favourably on the notion. By emphasising central selling points and other pivotal strategic sales points, desire for the proposal (and/or products) should be created in the mind of the receiver. The fourth step is where the receiver should be stimulated to react actively to the proposal, thus completing the persuasive process.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Jørgensen: 2003, p. 25

¹¹⁶ Kotler: 2003, p. 569

¹¹⁷ Zhu: 2005, p. 73

Not all messages take the recipient through all the steps presented in the AIDA model, but the model is an effective tool for a schematic presentation of the persuasive steps in the communication process.¹¹⁸

5.2 Composition

Moves

When setting up an e-mail there are many things to consider – especially regarding *move structure*. A thoroughly prepared text is divided into a number of *moves*, and each move contributes to fulfil the communicative intention of the text. A move is to be understood as a part of a text that seeks to implement a specific purpose by its content. By implementing each specific purpose in a move it is thereby possible to fulfil the communicative object of an e-mail.¹¹⁹

An e-mail is comprised by several steps that need to be perused before the actual sending. Today, most mailer software has incorporated a fixed discourse structure for e-mails which has become gradually standardized throughout the past twenty years. This fixed discourse structure simplifies the work for the user.

A keyword for writing a good e-mail is *organization*. As mentioned above, a well-prepared text consists of different moves, and for that reason when writing an e-mail it is important to ensure that each paragraph appears logical to the reader in terms of contents. If the e-mail consists of an introductory paragraph, a discussion paragraph, and a conclusion then you get off to a good start. The introduction should be used to clarify what you want and why you are writing. Next in the discussion paragraph give a thorough explanation of your points for doing so together with exact details. This paragraph will often include the moves that present the product and the company more thoroughly. This paragraph should stimulate the interest of the receiver and make him or her act on the proposal. Finally the conclusion should sum up the message together with follow-up information and other essential factors.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Kotler: 2003, p. 569

¹¹⁹ Frandsen et al.: 2002A, p. 112

¹²⁰ Gerson: 2006, p. 151

In order to enhance the credibility level of an initial contact, it would be advantageous to mention the previous record of your business as well as referring to other previous business partners or third parties. The larger and more recognized a business that is referred to, the bigger are chances of approval. This is a repetition of what we have mentioned previously in both the culture chapter as well as in the passage dealing with the ethical appeal.

Structure

An e-mail is framed like a traditional business letter and consists of a number of functional elements that differs somewhat in structure and terminology. It has two sections: The top being the preformatted area (the header) and the lower area for the text (the body or message) most frequently containing a signature block at the end. It is possible to attach a file to the e-mail that opens up a third space in which the attachment icon is to be found.

In general the format of the header contains four core elements or fields where each header field has a name and a value:

- To: The e-address/addresses to which the message is intended
- From: The e-address from which the message has been sent
- Subject: A brief description of the topic of the message
- Date: The local time and date of sending message

Furthermore there are several optional elements available within the header area:

- Cc: Carbon copy - A space for addresses which are to receive a copy of the message
- Bcc: Blind carbon copies - A space for addresses which also receive a copy of the message. However, these addresses are not visible to the prime recipient.

Finally, some e-mail software allows to user to rate the urgency of the e-mail, by adding an exclamation mark (low, normal, high priority) that symbolizes that a certain priority is to be given to the message.

For an e-mail to appear easily accessible it is very important to construct paragraphs as a help to the recipient. A good idea is to use the Tab key (tabulator key) or the space bar to indent the discussion unit of the e-mail (the body). In this way the discussion is accentuated to the reader. Essential points in the text should be set off either with asterisks (*), hyphens (-), or typed numbers. These are regular key strokes on the keyboard and are readily accessible compared to computer-generated highlighting techniques. In order to keep the text as easy-to-read and clear as possible remember to break for paragraphs frequently and to separate them by a double space.

In addition, headings are a good technique for introducing a new paragraph, and a good idea is to type the heading in all capital letters. However, the entire message should not be written in capital letters as this is difficult to read and might be an offence in certain cultures and misinterpreted as an 'angry' e-mail (shouting style). As mentioned earlier, this is one of the basic rules for practicing netiquette.

Business e-mails should be kept short, precise and limited to one screen if possible as a number of business people do not want to scroll through several screens to read a message.¹²¹ However, this of course depends on the actual intention of the message and the significance of its contents. Again, this varies from culture to culture.

Subject line, salutation and greetings

The most important part of the e-mail is the language of the subject line. Together with the sender's name this is the main attention of the message, and this is one of the factors that determine what priority the recipient assigns to it. The more effective a subject line, the bigger chances are that the recipient will read the message.¹²² Business people receive many e-mails every day, and a great deal of e-mails are most likely junk-mail if they are not automatically filtered out. Junk-mail is categorized by the subject description, and in most cases the subject line is written in capitals or has certain words emphasized. Therefore, it is advisable not to use capital letters, multiple exclamation points, or asterisks to make the subject stand out. It is optional whether to capitalize individual words as in the style of a book title ("The International Business Environment") or just go lowercase ("the international business environment").

¹²¹ Gerson: 2006, p.151

¹²² *ibid.*

In order to write a good subject line it is recommended to emphasize the main purpose of the e-mail by composing a very precise, brief and concrete description of the actual subject, i.e. a topic and a focus.¹²³

An e-mail is considered less formal than a traditional written business letter as there is no need for inside address, date or other formalities. The most common individual greeting formula in e-mails is *Dear Mr. / Ms.* followed by the recipient's surname. Regarding titles, they should be used where appropriate. If later, a first name basis is reached, it is common to begin with *Dear <name>* or simply *<name>*.

If the recipient's identity is unknown e.g. it is a group of people, the simplest solution, some might say, would be to skip the greeting. Nevertheless, it is advisable to use a group appellation or a description of the recipients, such as *Dear <titular>*, *Dear <company name> employees*.

For unknown individuals it is recommendable to opt for *Dear Sir or Madam, To Whom It May Concern* or the less formal *Greetings*. Furthermore when writing to your recipient you should mention how and where you got the e-mail address of the person to whom you are writing.

It is not always necessary to be formal when approaching a new and unknown business contact; however, due to cultural differences the greeting tends to be more formal and traditional in some parts of the world.¹²⁴ How is the level of formality in China compared to the level of formality in Denmark and vice versa? And which businesslike manners apply? These questions are thoroughly elaborated on in our culture chapter describing formal vs. informal cultures.

Denmark follows the general way of greeting as mentioned previously, but in China, for instance, there are certain directions that apply for greeting a Chinese person. Unlike Danish names, Chinese names are reversed in order, which means that the surname or family name comes first. This is an essential point in the initial contact with a Chinese business connection, as Chinese people look highly on titles and styles of addressing. Generally speaking, it is considered acceptable to address a Chinese person by the surname together with a title like *Mr., Ms., Director or Manager*.¹²⁵

The farewell or e-signature should preferably correspond to the greeting like in traditional business correspondence; however, a new dimension has been added. The use of a signature block is a very

¹²³ Crystal: 2001, pp. 94-128

¹²⁴ Miller: 2001

¹²⁵ Seligman: 1990, pp. 16-17

common feature in most contemporary business e-mail correspondence. It operates as a virtual business card, giving the name and significant contact information of the e-mail sender. These automatic signatures are inserted by the mailer software and are usually composed of the person's full name (title and qualifications), address, and communication details (e.g. phone, fax, e-mail, and website).¹²⁶

Grammar

When writing an e-mail many significant grammatical aspects are to be kept in mind. E-mail is a fast electronic media which allows you to correspond with others around the world rapidly; however, quite often this reflects in the result: Many people tend to be sloppy in their spelling and grammar which may leave a somewhat bad impression with the recipient and may be of great irritation to some people. For that reason it is highly advisable to proofread a message before sending it. Not all e-mail packages have spell and grammar checks, and often the writer does not know how to use the tools. It is therefore important to avoid spelling mistakes as these might undermine the sender's credibility.¹²⁷

Punctuation in an e-mail is essential for adding expression to the text. The lack of punctuation may cause difficulties in the actual understanding of the message. The usage of commas is very relevant and may not be omitted; however, commas should be used with caution. When a comma is placed correctly it clarifies the meaning of a sentence far better than any other form of punctuation. A comma is used to introduce, to separate, to enclose, or to show omission.

Another vital punctuation is the parenthesis which is used to add supplementary text or to keep descriptive text from complicating a sentence. Parentheses can be distracting elements to the reader which is why it is recommended not to overuse these.

Generally speaking it is best to use the active voice rather than the passive voice when writing a business e-mail. The term voice in writing refers to the relationship between the actor (subject) and the action (verb) taking place in a sentence. The use of the active voice makes the writing more precise and lively unlike passive constructions that are often unclear and wordy, and are most

¹²⁶ Crystal: 2001, p. 104

¹²⁷ Gerson: 2006, pp. 151-152

frequently used when an individual is less important than a nonliving object. An example hereof is:
¹²⁸ *I was hit by a dodgeball.*

A common feature in e-mails of today is the use of emoticons and electronic abbreviations. The use of smileys in formal e-mail business messages should be avoided as *smileys are the equivalent of e-mail slang*.¹²⁹ Furthermore, special formatting and highlighting techniques such as **boldface**, *italics*, underlining, computer-generated bullets and numbers, centering, font colour highlighting, and font colour changes can be another obstacle for certain recipients, as some software clients do not support these techniques. The message could end up being completely unintelligible.

In this context it is of great importance whether the business is situated in Europe or in Asia; due to cultural differences different ways of approaching applies, and it is advisable to thoroughly examine these before the initial contact takes place. It is important to keep in mind that not all abbreviations and acronyms are universal, and furthermore that dates, times, measurements, and monetary figures differ from country to country.¹³⁰

In Danish business life a great number of businesses invest money in working out carefully prepared language policies. A language manual makes it possible to standardize the business language both internally and externally, and at the same time enhances the credibility and the image of the business outwardly. It unifies the employees' way of approaching clients in terms of grammar, layout, general demands, correspondence, and writing style. Furthermore, it is an expression of responsibility that ensures against communicational gaps with the surrounding world. A language policy is mostly lucrative to larger businesses or organizations with many employees and much outgoing communication. We are aware that our extraordinary thoroughness in making the e-mail business proposal efficient may not even be noticed by the Chinese people; meaning that they, in some particular cases, may not be able to tell the difference between a thoroughly composed e-mail and one that is more carelessly made.

However, we feel that thoroughness equals trustworthiness, and by setting high standards, chances of success will be maximized.

¹²⁸ Angell: 1994, pp. 70-107

¹²⁹ Crystal: 2001, p.124

¹³⁰ Gerson: 2006, p.149

6. Cultural analysis

We will begin by making a brief presentation of the Chinese and Danish business cultures, in which we account for their general characteristics. Subsequently we will analyse the cultures comparatively through both the cultural dimensions as well as the communicative and linguistic dimensions listed in the theory section.

Finally, the conclusions from the comparative analysis will be listed in a diagram to create an overview. This overview will then be used for the further communicative and linguistic analysis of Chinese and Danish correspondence.

We will analyse a sample of Chinese business writing to establish the formality level and general structure. Furthermore we will analyse an example of PM's existing business writing in order to determine their current writing standard for future improvement.

Conclusively we will apply the analytic results in a communicative strategy guide for PM, which they can use when composing e-mails to China.

6.1 Business culture in China

*It's advisable to learn how to see relationships and obligations through Chinese eyes, because understanding how they view a situation provides definite advantages. [...] But it's equally important to remember who you are and what cultural baggage you bring to the party. [...] It's precisely the converse – learning enough about them to make them comfortable with you – that is to be strived for here.*¹³¹

First of all, let us emphasize the importance for international businesses of studying Chinese culture before making contact. Although the Chinese do not expect foreigners to have insight into all the elements of culture in China, they do expect you to have some basic knowledge.

As the largest country with the longest surviving civilisation, China is, from the perspective of most of its inhabitants, the centre of the universe. Before the first visit [or first contact], one should therefore achieve (1) a basic understanding of the sector market in which one is interested, and (2)

¹³¹ Seligman: 1990, p. 3

*some general knowledge and an understanding of social sensibilities.*¹³²

In other words, be aware of the pride of the Chinese people, and make sure to use it as an advantage in the writing in order to enhance your approach. Express politeness in general, but also through compliments e.g. by praising the Chinese and their culture, especially in the initial business proposal.¹³³

To be able to do so requires insight, and Ambler namely suggests that businesses interested in China broaden their general knowledge by spending a little time getting familiar with basic historical, economic, geographical and ethnic facts of the country and its people.¹³⁴ This will make it easier to give the abovementioned compliments.

Religious and philosophical issues are on this list of elements you should get acquainted with, in order to understand the Chinese way of thinking. Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, to name a few, play strong roles in the formation of the general Chinese mentality, and one could argue that these areas would be eligible for inclusion in a cultural study such as this report. We have, however, due to size restrictions chosen not to include this, since the sources we are using have already based their work on these universal Chinese notions. Only selected ideas, such as for example the aspect of harmony, which is very essential to Confucianism, will be discussed in the following alongside *gunaxi* and *Mianzi*, since they all play considerable roles in business respects.

All three fundamentals connect in several ways with some or all of the dimensions applicable in this report.

Harmony

The concept of harmony is expressed through the word *Hé*, which refers to *the smooth running of a group or society. Harmony is seen as good, conflict as bad. 'Hé' also means gentleness or friendliness.*¹³⁵

One should not be fooled, however, by thinking that the Chinese business people are soft.

¹³² Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 13

¹³³ Brødsgaard et. al.:1994, p. 74

¹³⁴ Ambler & Witzel: 2000, pp. 18+31

¹³⁵ *ibid.* p. 81

*Chinese negotiators are known to see the market place as a battleground. You should avoid mentioning weaknesses that the Chinese company is not already familiar with. The Chinese are distrustful in general and towards foreigners in particular, and they believe that one admitted weakness covers over ten others.*¹³⁶

Ambler takes this notion further, as he warns that foreigners *have to be especially careful as some [Chinese] business people have the underlying idea that, as foreigners ripped off China in the past, they are now fair game.*¹³⁷

Guanxi

*It is no exaggeration to say that relationships are the modus operandi of Chinese business. They are how things get done.*¹³⁸ They call it *guanxi* which literally means ‘relationships’, but ‘connections’ is a far better translation of this sense of the word. It has everything to do with who you know and what these people are willing – or obligated – to do for you.¹³⁹ It works as a reciprocal relationship that is built through doing favours for each other.

*The overall concept is personalization from which Chinese networks and similar phenomena emerge, such as mentors, backstage activities, cliques, and nepotism. These phenomena are also present in Western culture, though not to same extent as in China.*¹⁴⁰ Actually, *guanxi* is regarded one of the most important Chinese mechanisms in business culture, as emphasized by the post-graduate students we have interviewed.

Mianzi

The Chinese will avoid embarrassment above all – even stating their honest opinion. This is called *mianzi* or *saving face* and is as essential to Chinese culture as is *hé* and *guanxi*.

In Chinese business culture, a person’s reputation and social standing rest on saving face. [...] Mianzi defines a person’s place in his social network; it is the most important measure of social worth. Sources of face can be wealth, intelligence, attractiveness, skills, position, and, of course,

¹³⁶ Brødsgaard et. al.: 1994, p. 75

¹³⁷ Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 5

¹³⁸ *ibid.* p. 81

¹³⁹ Seligman: 1990, p. 45

¹⁴⁰ Worm: 1997, p. 125

*good guanxi. [...] The Chinese think of face in quantitative ways. Face, like money, can be earned, lost, given, or taken away.*¹⁴¹

At the risk of losing face, the Chinese will react acutely: *Causing someone to lose face can have severe consequences: at the very least, co-operation will cease and retaliation may ensue.*¹⁴² *In short, giving face increases the opportunity for rewards.*¹⁴³

Having described the basics of Chinese business culture, we will now look similarly at the Danish culture.

6.2 Business culture in Denmark

Although Western business culture is usually regarded a homogeneous entity, there are – needless to say – many differences across the West. We find Denmark to be a natural part of Western culture, and as such the country carries both characteristics universal for that region, as well as characteristics particular to this small country. In order to create this cultural business profile of Denmark, we will draw upon extracts from studies on both.

In general, the Danes are reputed to be a very reserved culture, not least in the business sector, where studies show that foreign businesses are having a hard time crossing the cultural gap.¹⁴⁴ Although this notion only seems relevant for Chinese businesses seeking a Danish partner, we deem that this distance works both ways, so it is important that Danish businesses engaging in international trade are aware of this perception of the Danes:

Marianne Stang Våland, Norwegian and chairman of Learning Lab Denmark, explains: *The Danes have a picture of themselves as a very open, positive and creative people. But the truth is that knowledge [business] in Denmark flows in almost hermetically sealed circuits, which is hard for outsiders to gain access to.*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Harvard Business Review: 2004, pp. 48-49

¹⁴² Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 70

¹⁴³ *ibid.* p. 71

¹⁴⁴ Lindholm & Stokholm: 2004

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 39

Michael McGee, American businessman in the Danish branch of US-based Nypro, continues: *It's not that you [the Danes] seem hostile, not at all. I just guess that you Danes do not really need anyone else than yourselves. I used to live in China for 2.5 years. It was a bit easier than here. People were curious and open towards speaking to you.*¹⁴⁶

This is what Gullestrup refers to as an objectified inter-subjectivity.¹⁴⁷ This means that the Danish company must penetrate the cultural bubble (their pre-understanding or horizon) before making contact in order to give the communication the best possible odds of success.

The statements of Våland and McGee are also highly compatible with the conclusions of Sir James Mellon, former British ambassador in Copenhagen. He depicts the Danes as a tribe, rather than a nation. A nation, he says, usually consists of many tribes bound together by shared features such as language and culture, and as such, a nation is usually a synthesis of varied elements. Not only does he see the Danes as a tribe, he also finds them to be one of the most homogeneous peoples in the world.¹⁴⁸

This leads him to the following conclusions:

- Danes have a high degree of trust towards other Danes, but a low degree towards non-Danes.
- Danes have a high degree of satisfaction of being Danish.
- Danes fear for their identity when having to incorporate features from other culture into their own.

Having made this general preamble on Chinese and Danish business culture, we will now make an actual comparative analysis of the two. To do that systematically, we will measure by the dimensions listed earlier herein to uncover the manifest layers, as advocated by Gullestrup.¹⁴⁹

We would like to repeat that we believe that the manifest layers are reflections of the core culture layers.

¹⁴⁶ Lindholm & Stokholm: 2004, p. 41

¹⁴⁷ Cf. chapter 3.1.2

¹⁴⁸ Mellon in Gundelach: 1996, pp. 9-10

¹⁴⁹ Cf. chapter 3.1.1

6.3 Comparative analysis

In our theoretical account, we have chosen the following dimensions for our analysis:

- Specific vs. diffuse cultures (cultural dimension)
- Achievement vs. ascription cultures (cultural dimension)
- Deal-focus vs. relationship-focus (cultural dimension)
- Direct vs. indirect language (cultural dimension)
- Formal vs. informal culture (cultural dimension)
- Uncertainty avoidance (cultural dimension)
- High vs. low context cultures (cultural dimension)

The key points of the comparative analysis will be juxtaposed in a diagram to form tangible conclusions for usage in our communicative strategy guide.

Since this report deals with one way transmission from Danish to Chinese culture, our main focus will naturally be put on the latter.

Specific vs. diffuse cultures

The Chinese are known to be generally diffuse in their business conduct, which means that the distinction between work and leisure contexts is blurred. The different roles you possess in different contexts are intertwined, and the position you have in a company is affected by personal status. Although conveyed in many ways, Worm sees it to be a reflection of the general Chinese mistrust of strangers, with whom *they will only associate with at a superficial level in the beginning*,¹⁵⁰ before gradually developing trust. As such, it has a strong connection with guanxi, namely the importance for international business people to establish a relationship with Chinese business people before negotiations.

*The diffuse orientation in China [...] affects how one gets to know other people.*¹⁵¹ [...]

¹⁵⁰ Worm: 1997, p. 97

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

*The approach is very indirect. They give high priority to time spent on getting to know business partners, and they are reluctant to enter into business relationships with people whom they do now know.*¹⁵²

Another prominent feature of the Chinese diffuse culture is the nepotistic way of how they tie in family and business relations very closely. Thus, it not unusual for the Chinese to try to get family members a job at their own workplace, or to use their network to this end.¹⁵³

Danes, on the other hand, are much more specific, and carry a clear distinction between working life and leisure.¹⁵⁴ [...] They divide their life into various segments, each independent of each other.¹⁵⁵

Making acquaintance is done through much simpler processes, as the Danes, in Worm's words, are much more straightforward with more transparent reasons for making contact. Nepotism, although still existing, is much less spread than in China.¹⁵⁶

Achievement vs. ascription cultures

Status is extremely important in Chinese business relationships. *Even though it is often hard to determine the rank of someone who comes from an entirely different system, let alone relate it to your own organizational standards, the Chinese can be counted on to try their best at this.*¹⁵⁷

It is to be expected that a Chinese recipient will examine your rank through the initial approach, so making yourself appear important will most likely give you a higher level of entry into the organisation than if you do not. It is important to present your company in an attractive manner in order to give an impression of status and prestige.

A Danish company should be aware of the fact that, as status in China is *ascribed* according to age, gender, personal relations etc., it is highly likely that you, at first

¹⁵² Worm: 1997, p. 98

¹⁵³ *ibid.* p. 97

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Seligman: 1990, p. 68

contact, risk corresponding with someone who is in fact less competent in a specific field

An important point is to acknowledge the rank of your counterpart, and generally treat Chinese business people with respect.

Although Danish business culture is very achievement based, Denmark carries a large paradox in that sense, namely by subconsciously adhering to Janteloven (The Law of Jante). It rules that *no one should set himself or herself up as better, smarter or richer than anyone else*.¹⁵⁸ Paradoxically enough, Danes still rely almost solely on achievements when judging a counterpart's skills and integrity. To pin point the paradox, you can say that the Danes want you to know their credentials, but they would like not to tell you themselves. Gullestrup also pointed this out during our meeting. Actually, many Danes go as far, when asked, as *understating their achievements and making deprecating remarks. Indeed it would be fair to say that modesty is a national characteristic of Danes, who may be put off by the breezy kind of promotion they see in people from certain other cultures*.¹⁵⁹ What is important in this context, for a Danish company approaching a Chinese, is to go beyond the limitations of The Law of Jante, as such a concept does not exist in China, and they should not hesitate to praise their own company as well as that of the recipient.

Deal-focus vs. relationship-focus cultures

Relationship is very important in Chinese business. This is because *much of Chinese society – including its businesses – is organised on relationship principles*,¹⁶⁰ meaning that relationship plays a much larger role in their way of organising trade than in most Western cultures. Before actually doing business with a new acquaintance, the Chinese company will focus on building a relationship, to evaluate whether the new acquaintance is trustworthy in general, and specifically whether they are worthy to do business with at all. Once you manage to establish that level of trust, the relationship will progress into actually getting down to business, so to speak.

¹⁵⁸ Gesteland: 2005, p. 291

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 292

¹⁶⁰ Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 81

The relationship must be balanced and harmonious in order to develop into an actual setting where business can be conducted, so the Chinese will use the initial phase – including the initial contact – to judge their counterpart and put a lot of effort into finding out as much as possible about you. That is one of the reasons why it is important to give a thorough introduction in the first correspondence, specifically to ensure that the Chinese are given the impression that you are an established, well-esteemed company that they will be able to engage in a harmonious business relationship with.

Another angle to the relationship-based foundation of the Chinese business culture is the concept of *guanxi*, as described previously. This covers, among other things, how the Chinese tend to use favours from each other, creating much of their business within close ranks of friends and often even family.¹⁶¹

Of course, you – as an international business – will never be able to get as close to your potential Chinese business partner as he is with personal friends in business. But you should make every effort of creating a trustful relationship between the two of you.

The following example from Seligman's *Dealing With The Chinese* underlines this fact and provides foreign businesses with a couple of pragmatic tools to use when dealing with their Chinese counterparts:

A Western company sent 4-5 telex messages to a Chinese company without getting any reply – and thus, the Western company decided to quit trying, giving up on any chance of doing business. Seligman gives his personal estimate of what went wrong: The first telex had reached someone ranked fairly high in the Chinese organisation. This director or manager then used his network to investigate the name of the Western company. The Western company probably did not emerge in any of the enquiries of the other managers, and therefore he trashed the telex and all the subsequent telexes. Why? Because the Chinese do not like to do business with strangers, and since *a negative response is considered impolite*, not answering is *less awkward for all concerned*. Furthermore, *the Chinese generally do not feel strong social obligations to people or*

¹⁶¹ Gesteland: 2005, pp. 24-25

*organizations they do not know. [...] Simply put, the Chinese probably didn't feel they owed anyone an answer.*¹⁶²

One way to go around this is to focus more on establishing a relationship in your initial proposal, leaving the more detailed business suggestion for later correspondence. As symbolised by above example, the Chinese generally put more focus on relationship before deciding whether to engage in business relations with a given organisation. A Chinese business saying goes: *First you make a friend, then you make a deal.*¹⁶³

Another approach, as described by Seligman, suggests using an intermediary – a third party liaison, whom the Chinese company knows and preferably trusts, to make a formal introduction. The goodwill of such an entity will rub off on your organisation, and your Chinese counterpart will look differently on not having done business with you before. Although this is a good rule of thumb, times are slowly changing. Seligman continues by stating that *the need for go-betweens is diminishing. Now it's easier than ever to make contact yourself. To avoid a non-response like the one above, however, it's best in your initial overture to present a lot of information about your company and the venture that you propose.*¹⁶⁴

Seligman suggests that you *send materials that describe your company and its history, and literature about its products or services. Provide references, if you can – something to help the Chinese counterpart understand that your firm is a worthy partner.*¹⁶⁵ As such, your references work as a kind of third party liaison and decrease the need for involving a third party.

If, however, you are to use a third party introduction, make sure to use the right ones. Good approaches – according to Gesteland – include government trade representatives, chambers of commerce, bank affiliations or, of course, trade associates carrying good reputations in China.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Seligman: 1990, pp. 5-6

¹⁶³ Gesteland: 2005, p. 180

¹⁶⁴ Seligman: 1990, p. 6

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Gesteland: 2005, p. 180

Seeing as the Chinese people are very concerned with the reaction of their surroundings, *a great deal can be gained by helping the Chinese to win face and a great deal will be lost by any affront or slight, no matter how unintended, especially for older and/or more senior people.*¹⁶⁷

Investigating your counterpart before making an initial proposal enables you to praise your recipient in one way or another, giving them face and thereby establishing a foundation for creating a good relationship.

The Danes are very deal focused, and it is common to approach new business contacts directly, rather than through an intermediary. Once contact is established, deals are closed fairly quickly, given that the product or the service lives up to the expectations of the buyer. In other words, it is normal to get down to business very early in any correspondence – also in the initial proposal.¹⁶⁸

This means that a Danish company, attempting to do business with a Chinese, needs to have patience and realise that there is no rushing a deal. In this case a certain amount of adapting is crucial in order to be able to conduct any kind of business.

The fact that the Danes are deal focused also affects the writing style and makes the language more direct and explicitly formulated, which leads us to the following dimension.

Direct vs. indirect language

One of the main elements of this dimension is the focus on harmony. Since the Chinese focus so heavily on maintaining harmony among themselves and their counterparts, it is necessary for them to avoid saying anything that will offend the other, or in any way create disharmony.

This is particularly difficult in business negotiation, since two parties rarely agree on everything. So in order to get around this paradox, the Chinese culture uses implicit encoding/decoding to a very great extent.¹⁶⁹ In a situation like that, it is crucial to be

¹⁶⁷ Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 70

¹⁶⁸ Gesteland: 2005, p. 290

¹⁶⁹ Cf. chapter 4.1

familiar with the basics of this communication system, especially for a foreigner. So people doing business with the Chinese should be aware that an answer such as ‘that can prove difficult’, can in fact mean ‘no, that is impossible’.

The Chinese concept of sincerity is the opposite of the Anglo-American, in that the Chinese believe that they can manifest sincerity only by adhering carefully to prescribed etiquette, whereas Westerners believe that etiquette obscures truth. In a sense the Chinese are saying, ‘I will show my sincerity in my relations with you by going to the trouble to be so absolutely correct toward you that you will be untroubled about any matters of face.’¹⁷⁰

The Chinese consider pleasing their counterpart to be an act of honesty and respect, even if they are in fact unable to fulfil a promise made.¹⁷¹ This way they believe they are able to save face and maintain a good relationship with you.

These aspects are characteristic for all high context cultures, which we deem China to be one of – as described in the following dimension.

The Danes, being deal-oriented, have very different expectations of a communication process, and this, in combination with high-context thinking, can lead to several misunderstandings. The direct and sometimes blunt language can easily offend a relationship focused recipient as well as the implicit writing style can confuse or mislead a deal focused recipient. These things are to be taken into consideration when writing an initial business proposal.

Style implications:

The direct communication style can be characterized as an explicit way of writing propositions, wishes, and intentions. In Danish business life it is common to be straightforward without too much beating about the bush. Danes are considered very direct in their communication, as are most Western countries.

In Chinese business culture, however, the indirect way of communicating is used.

Chinese are apt to express themselves more implicitly which often results in their true

¹⁷⁰ Ambler & Witzel: 2000, p. 70

¹⁷¹ Worm: 1998, p. 22

intentions being concealed by a vague choice of words as for example *possibly, rather, perhaps, or maybe*.

Formal vs. informal cultures

Rank ties in strongly with the notion of formality, which is also an important notion in Chinese business. *The Harvard Business Review on Doing Business in China*¹⁷², from which we have used several extracts for this report, states that *American-style “just call me Mary” casualness does not play well in a country where the Confucian values of obedience and deference to one’s superior remain strong*. Although we, as mentioned earlier, have decided not to delve into Confucian angles of Chinese culture, we can still use this phrase to establish that Chinese professional relationships are based on a hierarchical system of ranking – a system only possible through a formalized set of rules for interaction. Rules that make sure that no-one, especially superiors, risk losing face.

Known to be very egalitarian and informal, Danes speak to each other very directly, regardless of whether in a private or business context. Further to that, *visitors encounter relatively few etiquette rituals in Denmark, whereas people in more formal, hierarchical societies value rituals as ways [...] to show appropriate respect to high-status persons*.¹⁷³

Uncertainty avoidance

Contrary to what you might think China rates fairly low on the uncertainty avoidance index¹⁷⁴, according to both Hofstede¹⁷⁵, and Worm¹⁷⁶ who places them a little below the middle on the dimension scale (in average, as it varies greatly from region to region). This is rather unexpected for us, since *poor countries tend to rank higher on the scale than developed countries*,¹⁷⁷ so we had the impression that China would rate high on the scale. Worm have researched the reason for their low uncertainty avoidance, and comes to the conclusion that *it is probably, in part, due to political conditions. The many shifts*

¹⁷² Harvard: 2002

¹⁷³ Gesteland: 2005, p. 291

¹⁷⁴ Wikipedia: 2006D

¹⁷⁵ Hofstede: 2003

¹⁷⁶ Worm: 1997, p. 95

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

*in the totalitarian political line have made cadres uncertain and passive.*¹⁷⁸ Also, he points out that it might have to do with the *Chinese eagerness to free their entrepreneurial spirit. [...] These tendencies have become increasingly clear in recent years with the introduction of a market economy.*¹⁷⁹

Danes and Scandinavians are rated similarly on the scale, although even lower. *Uncertainty avoidance tends to be low in Scandinavian countries, [...] and their positive attitude towards others differs from the Chinese suspicion of those they do not know.*¹⁸⁰ They are *known for being tolerant of other opinions and of those who are different, which should make it easier to operate among people preferring more structured situations,*¹⁸¹ meaning cultures rating higher on the uncertainty avoidance dimension scale – including China.

High vs. low context cultures

Gesteland equals the high vs. low context dimension with the deal vs. relationship dimension, and thus – as mentioned above – places the Chinese people in the very far side of the spectrum as a highly relationship-based, high-context culture.¹⁸²

The high context notion also relates very closely to the use of direct vs. indirect language, since both dimensions deal with what is said vs. what is meant. Worm exemplifies by stating that in the West actions are essential, whereas the conservation of harmony and respect for hierarchy is more important.¹⁸³

Reading between the lines is essential when decoding Chinese communication, as the real meaning is often implicit.

Gesteland also deals with Danes in his high/low context index, and naturally the Danish culture is placed very far from China in that respect, being a low context culture. Still, however, not as low context as, say, the Germans.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Worm: 1997, p. 95

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 77

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

¹⁸² Gesteland: 2005, p. 40-42

¹⁸³ Worm: 1998, p. 22

¹⁸⁴ Gesteland: 2005, p. 42

We have extracted the main points of every dimension and put them into the following diagram:

Dimension	Chinese business culture	Danish business culture	Practical usage for PM
Specific vs. Diffuse	<u>Diffuse</u> Personal status affects business Guanxi Mistrust of strangers	<u>Specific</u> Distinction between work and leisure Straightforward	Consider guanxi – i.e. attempt to establish a relationship before negotiating Make references to non-work related issues Adaption
Achievement vs. ascription	<u>Ascription-based</u> Status is ascribed according to age, gender etc. You get judged by who you are Status and rank are important	<u>Achievement-based</u> Status is achieved and earned through actions You get judged by you actions Adhering to the law of Jante	Present the company in a manner attractive to the Chinese in order to meet their perception of status and rank Praise your own company as well as that of your recipient Make yourself appear important and prestigious by using a significant title Acknowledge the rank of your counterpart, and generally treat Chinese business people with respect Go beyond limitations of the law of Jante

<p>Deal vs. relationship focus</p>	<p><u>Relationship-focused</u></p> <p>A relationship needs to be established before business can be conducted</p> <p>A foreign proposal will be thoroughly examined to evaluate worthiness</p> <p>Face</p>	<p><u>Deal-focused</u></p> <p>Direct approach</p> <p>Deals are closed quickly</p>	<p>Give a thorough introduction in the first correspondence specifically to ensure that the Chinese are given the impression that you are an established, well-esteemed company that they will be able to engage in a harmonious business relationship with</p> <p>Describe your company and its history and provide references if possible</p> <p>Establish a relationship in the initial enquiry, leaving the more detailed business suggestion for later correspondence</p> <p>Use a third party liaison that the Chinese company knows and trusts, to make a formal introduction in order to create goodwill</p> <p>Help the Chinese recipient win face</p> <p>- Investigating your counterpart before making an initial proposal enables you to praise your recipient in one way or another, giving them face and thereby establishing a foundation for creating a good relationship.</p>
<p>Direct vs. indirect</p>	<p><u>Indirect</u></p> <p>Indirect and implicit language</p> <p>Consider pleasing their counterpart at all costs to be an act of honesty and respect</p> <p>Avoid creating disharmony</p>	<p><u>Direct</u></p> <p>Direct and explicit language</p>	<p>Direct and sometimes blunt language can easily offend a relationship focused recipient as well as the implicit writing style can confuse or mislead a deal focused recipient.</p>

Formal vs. Informal	<u>Formal</u> Hierarchical system of ranking Formalized set of rules for interaction Avoid losing face	<u>In-formal</u> Direct language	Be aware of the level of formality Help the recipient win face Show respect
Uncertainty avoidance	<u>Middle</u> Suspiciousness towards strangers	<u>Low level</u> Positive attitude towards others Tolerance	Minimize the level of uncertainty Customize your message to the cultural traits of the recipient - make a thorough introduction of yourself in order to mitigate prejudice on their part.
High vs. Low	<u>High</u> Conservation of harmony What is said is not necessarily what is meant	<u>Low</u> Action What is said is what is meant	Keep in mind that a Chinese recipient interprets your proposal according to own pre-understandings Attempt to use more implicit language Give impression of honesty between the lines Write according to what you expect the Chinese would want to hear

The purpose of this diagram is to point out the differences of the two business cultures and thereby giving an overview of which areas PM needs to adapt to in their initial correspondence.

Lastly, let us establish that although the abovementioned dimensions and accounts of cultural patterns and behaviour are applicable in any cross-cultural interaction, including written correspondence, one should also remember that the Chinese and Danes, just like any other people on this planet, react not only according to cultural values, but also on the basis of concrete and

tangible conditions. Cultural guidelines such as these must never become a pretext for not using common sense. One must pay attention to the surrounding circumstances of your recipient.¹⁸⁵

We would also like to emphasize that we see these behavioural patterns described in the cultural dimensions as manifest layers reflecting deeper core culture layers, cf. Gullestrup's theory.

Hall concludes very well the mechanism of cross-cultural communication when pointing out *how an overt act seen from the vantage point of one's own culture can have an entirely different meaning when looked at in the context of the foreign culture.*¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Brødsgaard et al.: 1994, p. 74

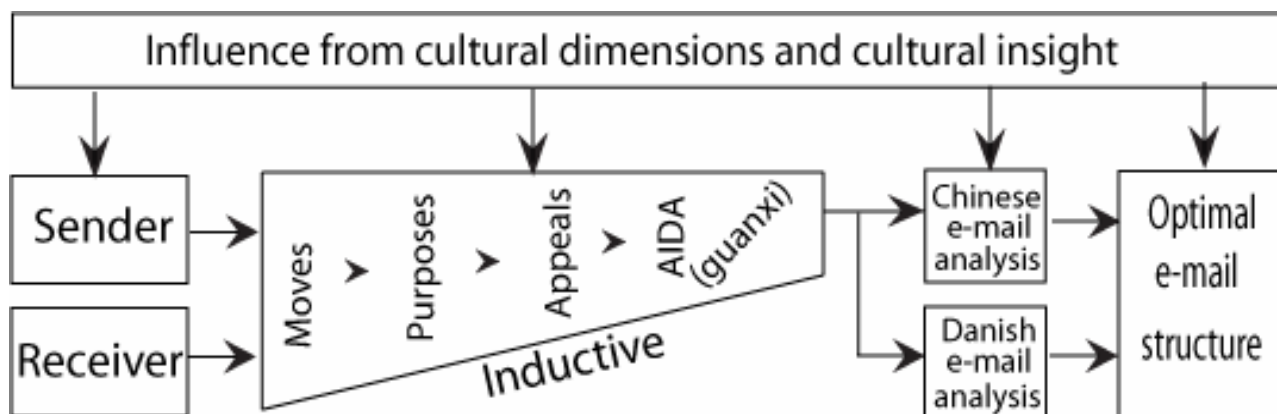
¹⁸⁶ Hall: 1981, p. 58

7. Analysis of e-mail structure

In order to form a general view of our e-mail analysis section, we have worked out a diagram that illustrates the steps of our analysis. The diagram is designed to show how our theory will be applied to each step of the analysis. With this analysis of the business e-mail structure we endeavour to compose an example of how the optimal business e-mail should preferably be composed.

We will have the cultural theory covered above in mind throughout the analysing process. We will elaborate on the roles of both sender, being PM, and receiver, PM's Chinese counterpart.

Then we will inductively go through the structure of the e-mail itself, working our way up from the particular level containing the various moves an e-mail is composed of to the general level, where the AIDA steps and the guanxi influence is seen. Then we will make a comparative analysis of a Chinese sales letter and an e-mail from PM. Finally, our findings in the analysis section will be summarised and detailed in a schematic figure.



7.1 Sender

Progressive Media is a small, Aalborg-based telecommunication software developer. They have been in business for four years and have established business relations with many different distributors and publishers in the Western hemisphere, especially in Europe. They develop new games and convert existing, branded games from other platforms to the mobile device platforms. So far they have been successful in their endeavours in Western cultures, but have been unsuccessful in approaching the East-Asian market.

When systematically composing a proposal aimed at adapting to another culture, it is important to be aware of your own identity, culture and the image you are subconsciously presenting. Especially towards the Chinese, who focus very much on the integrity of their business partners, it is of high importance to present a set well-defined values and goals of your company, as well as be aware of the mechanics of your own culture.

We have already established the basics of Danish business culture that naturally also captures the overall cultural context that PM is a part of. Secondly, we will now briefly determine the company's corporate culture. This will be useful in comparison with the expected corporate culture of the average counterpart, which we will determine further below.

Use Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's diagramme shows that Danes – being informal and achievement-focused (thus being egalitarian in our terms), combined with the deal-focus mentality – is generally a part of the *guided missile* corporate culture, the project-oriented culture of the four. It is our impression that PM carries the same scores on these three dimensions as the Danes in general – thereby establishing that PM is also a part of that particular corporate culture.

PM's characteristics, according to Trompenaars & Hampden-Turners diagram,¹⁸⁷ are as follows: They approach specific tasks as shared objectives with problem-centred, professional, practical, cross-disciplinary competences. They respect each other as specialists and experts, and status is achieved by project group members who contribute to reaching the goal.

The management of the company is done by objectives, and aims shift as target moves. Motivation is pay or credit for performance and problems solved. In case of errors or personal mistakes, criticism is given in a constructive task-related way, paving the way for admitting the error and correcting it as fast as possible.

7.2 Receiver

In our initial talks with PM, they mentioned that their primary targets for partnership agreements were the three largest telecommunications publishers in China. We are unable to make a precise target audience analysis of the receiver in this communicative context, as this is not a market analysis report, but based on various sources¹⁸⁸ we reckon the receiver to be a higher-ranking chief buyer or purchasing manager in a major Chinese corporation. We learned from our respondents that

¹⁸⁷ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

¹⁸⁸ Based on the interview med Thomas (appendix 1), Zhu: 2005 and our common sense.

the Chinese managers' skills in written English are on an adequate level to do international business. Furthermore, some mentioned that if the recipient finds himself unable to handle a proposal due to linguistic difficulties, it will be forwarded to skilled translators. Naturally, this generalisation is a dangerous assumption, as the term adequate is somewhat relative and because of the simple fact that people are heterogeneous. Of course, PM should research their recipient thoroughly before making the initial contact. This, however, is not for us to do in this report. We will be content with establishing the presumed corporate culture based on the above.

In general, China's ascription-based mentality and high score in the formality dimension makes their business structure highly hierarchical in our judgment. Combined with the highly relationship-based focus in business relations (*guanxi*) places the Chinese in the *family* corporate culture in the Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's diagram,¹⁸⁹ assigning them the following general characteristics:¹⁹⁰

Hierarchical company structure with status ascribed to leaders who are powerful and caring of their employees through diffuse relationships to an organic whole to which all members of the organisation is bonded. The organisation is managed by subjectives, with the leaders deciding solely when course or goals needs to be changed.

Work is conducted on an intuitive and holistic foundation and criticism over personal errors are received by subordinates by turn the other cheek in order to save other's face (that would make the superior lose power). Colleagues and business partners are considered family members, and motivation lies primarily in an intrinsic satisfaction of being loved and respected.

We do not entirely agree with Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner in all the above characteristics, as it is our impression, based on our newly acquired knowledge on Chinese contemporary development that parts of the general Chinese corporate culture is gradually taking a Western turn, embracing the Anglo-American way of conducting business. So the most radical of above statements should probably be taken with more or less moderation. Especially in the telecommunication business, we believe, with its somewhat short history and fundamentally internationalised foundation.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

¹⁹⁰ Cf. chapter 3.2.2

It is, however, very important to be aware of the fact that you will need to decipher the codes that the receiver uses in everyday correspondence, those being social codes, business specific codes, national codes, universal codes. Many of these codes, the visible manifest layers of any culture, are visible through a more cultural specific analysis of both the business- and corporate culture that the receiver is a part of.

7.3 Moves and purposes

We will now list and elaborate on the moves we find most important in Danish-Chinese e-mail correspondence. This will be exemplified in a standard e-mail template, which PM can use when composing e-mails to their Chinese recipient. We have developed the optimal move structure on the basis of the move structures presented in Zhu: 2005. Our insight into Chinese business culture is based primarily on research conducted by her in a project in which she has compared a number of sales letters and interviewed an abundance of managers from China and New Zealand in relation to these letters.

Moves	Steps	Purposes
Subject	Heading	To attract the recipient's attention
Salutation	Salutation	To establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith
Greeting	Greeting Third party referencing Praising the recipient	
Introductory move	Providing background information on PM	To achieve a positive, worthy and prestigious image
Establishing credentials	Providing specific credentials Third party referencing	
Introducing the proposal for partnership	Detailing essential information on PM Detailing essentials of the product portfolio Indicating the benefits of a partnership deal and products Referring to previous successful projects/products Third party referencing	To persuade the receiver to accept your business proposal by giving positive appraisals of PM
Soliciting a response	Making a request for response	To solicit a positive response and encourage further communication
Closing move	Offering good wishes Signing and dating	To establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith

We have extracted the moves presented by Zhu and moulded them to fit the initial e-mail business proposal applicable for PM. Furthermore, we have edited the purposes to fit this context.

The abovementioned eight moves are essential to PM for getting their message across in the best way possible. The following describes the main purposes of each move:

The *subject line* has the purpose of attracting the attention of the recipient. When composing the subject line PM should concentrate on giving a precise, brief, and concrete description of the e-mail's main purpose consisting of a topic and a focus. It is important that a personal touch is added to the subject line, as this is very appealing to a Chinese business person.

The *salutation* should be adjusted to the specific recipient concerned. When approaching a potential Chinese business partner PM should not be too informal, as the primary aim of the salutation is to indicate the appropriate level of respect. In addressing a recipient we suggest the use of *Dear + title + name*. *Title* is used in order to comply with the level of formality expected, and *dear* in order to adhere to the Western influence which is permeating the Chinese business world of today (as opposed to the salutation *respected*, which is considered too old-fashioned).¹⁹¹ This way of showing respect is the first approach to establishing a relationship with a Chinese person.

The *greeting* can preferably be worked out on the basis of the traditional Chinese way of being polite by introducing a third party reference thus using personal appeals. If this is not possible however, it is advisable to praise the company of the recipient, using emotional appeals, on the basis of thorough research of the company and its products.

In general, greetings are used in the attempt to create relationships. Therefore much thought and consideration should be put into the phrasing of the greeting, as it forms the basis of the first impression.

The *introductory move* is used with the purpose of creating the best possible image of your company with the intention of building a relationship. In this case PM should give a presentation of their company appearing worthy and prestigious with values that appeal to the Chinese (e.g. effectiveness, high status, honesty, and respectfulness). The introductory move is good for maintaining the attention and interest of the recipient, stressing the interpersonal aspect, in order to make sure that the e-mail is in fact acknowledged.

¹⁹¹ Zhu: 2005, p. 83

Establishing credentials is also important. In this case PM should use third party referencing as a way of enhancing their image in a positive way. PM can include whatever they consider an advantage to attract the reader's attention e.g. references or testimonials from trade associates, bank affiliates or government trade representatives carrying good reputations in China. We suggest mentioning previous fields of activity including sales experiences, successfully conducted projects or product awards. This way of attracting attention is a significant step and should be carefully prepared.

When *introducing the proposal for partnership* we suggest that PM maintain a polite and respectful tone by using the *we* approach as opposed to the *you* approach as a linguistic strategy. The *you* approach is the most frequently used in the Western world. It captures the reader, and at the same time it personalizes the tone of the message. The *we* approach on the other hand has an aura of respect and formality, and in conjunction with adjectives/superlatives the same effect can be achieved as with the *you* approach. An example of the *we* approach is: *We are sincerely pleased to offer you...*¹⁹²

Furthermore one should promote the product using logical appeals laden with superlatives and other lexical boosts. It should indicate the benefits of the product by positive and attractive wordings. Again referring to previous successful products and projects helps enhancing the credibility level. You should always strive to avoid mentioning price, or indicating that it is cheap, because when the Chinese read cheap, they associate with poor quality. When the Chinese do mention price, they preferably use vague language such as offering a non-specific special price to avoid absolute terminology.¹⁹³ As the preservation of harmony is essential in the Chinese culture, the avoidance of possibly offensive phrasing is a tool for upholding the *guanxi*. A typical Western approach is offering detailed benefits whereas *in Chinese letters* [...] "*economic profits*" *in general is often stressed as an incentive.*¹⁹⁴

PM should *solicit a response*. The soliciting should be composed of a request in a somewhat formal style. PM should refrain from goal-oriented phrasing and low-contextuality and avoid the use of imperative and directive phrasing. A phrase like *we look forward to hearing from you* is very useful

¹⁹² Zhu: 2005, pp. 86-87

¹⁹³ *ibid.* p. 89

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

in this context, and it is important that there are no hints of pressuring or obligation implied in the sentencing.

The final step of e-mail is the *closing move*. When writing this step PM should adhere to the general polite way of ending a business letter by thanking the recipient for his or her co-operation.

Thanking is considered to be both an appreciation of the reader as well as for the possibility of cooperating in the future. We suggest that the closing move be followed by a signature block or an e-signature displayed below the text containing PM's significant contact information.

The focus on the additional, China-specific purpose called *to establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith* correlates with our findings on how high-context cultures value long-term relationships. This is covered in both theory and analysis of many of the cultural dimensions, showing how guanxi-permeated the Chinese business culture is.

7.4 AIDA and appeals

The four AIDA steps are common to both Chinese and Danish business writing. Therefore, PM should follow these steps when composing e-mails. Furthermore, adding the Chinese-specific guanxi dimension to the four AIDA-steps should ensure a successful writing style. For example, writing respectfully and sincerely helps a great deal in attracting and holding attention (the first and second steps in the AIDA process); since *Chinese managers found that a high level of respect could be a strategy to attract the reader's attention.*¹⁹⁵

The use of the model has been most prevalent and successful in the Western hemisphere, but since China's turn towards free market economy, this has changed, expanding its use to China as well. Earlier, Chinese business correspondence was based highly on the relationship or guanxi factor and the fact that official bureaucracy ran everything.¹⁹⁶ There was not much need for persuading and arousing interest, since official procedures decided how to distribute goods. As we will see in the comparative analysis of the e-mails the current trends in Chinese business writing correspond with the steps of the AIDA model spiced with a heavy dose of guanxi. In our analysis, we will see which

¹⁹⁵ Zhu: 2005, p. 87

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.* p. 73

appeals are used in order to obtain the goal of the AIDA model (persuasion and ensuing action), and which appeals are used to establish guanxi.

In the analysis of a letter voted most efficient by Chinese managers, Zhu states that *both relationship building and sales promotion are discussed as essential for Chinese sales-letter writing.*¹⁹⁷ Hence, we suggest that a business e-mail from PM to China should focus on relationship building via personal and especially emotional appeals, and it should focus on sales promotion via logical appeals. The logical appeals are used in presenting the product (or in PM's case, proposal for partnership) by praising and explaining how to the product/proposal is superior to all others. The Chinese tend to use a more grandiose language when presenting the object of the sale.

Both logical and emotional appeals are important between sender and receiver in Chinese writing, as opposed to the Danish style in writing, where the logical appeals are stressed as being most significant. According to Zhu's research, in Chinese correspondence, *it is important to express the writer's feelings and good faith in order to make the writing appeal to the reader. [...] To Chinese scholars, qing or "emotional approach" and li or "logical approach" are still underlying principles in the writing of practical and professional genres.*¹⁹⁸

In the persuasive nature of the proposal, both emotional and logical appeals (tailor-made to suit the Chinese recipient) can be useful in completing the steps of the abovementioned AIDA model.

The shared emphasis by both Danes and Chinese writers on the logical appeals in the discussion paragraphs of the e-mail allows us to juxtapose these when it comes to communicative purposes.¹⁹⁹ The product/proposal introduction is the part of the letter, where the Chinese and Danish styles are most similar. They both aim to persuade the receiver to accept the business proposal by giving positive appraisals.

The emotional appeal is used more in Chinese business writing than in Danish. We believe PM would benefit from imitating this style, even though it may seem a bit off when reading this kind of phrasing as a Dane. The emotional approach is used often when praising the recipient and soliciting

¹⁹⁷ Zhu: 2005, p. 97

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 53

¹⁹⁹ See more on the specifics of the appeals in Danish-Chinese context below.

a response to the offer. Catering respectfully to the Chinese business man's sense of status and thereby anticipating any potential face issues is an exemplary way of using the emotional appeal.

The personal appeal is widely used in especially Western writing. Referring to third parties, whom the Chinese hold in high regard, is a powerful tool in establishing a positive, polite and cooperative image. This particular style of appeal is effectively used in establishing your credentials in the opening of the letter (and perhaps elaborating it later on). The e-mail medium offers the sender the opportunity to refer to status-enhancing entities via hyper-linking. Linking to web pages containing information on successfully completed projects or highly esteemed business partners would be prudent.

Relationship building is everything in China. Whereas we in Denmark often in the correspondence situation see ourselves as two individuals communicating, the Chinese business correspondence has a more inter-organisational feel to it. But still, the writer should strive to make a personal connection with the recipient that goes beyond the seller-buyer relationship, since the interpersonal *guanxi* is very valuable.²⁰⁰ Zhu reiterates: *In this way, sales letters may encompass both levels of organisational and interpersonal relationships within the Chinese business mentality. [...] This cultural practice also ties in well with Hall's high-context cultures that stress the importance of not only group harmony but also long-term relationships.*²⁰¹

The Chinese recipient may very well see the initial e-mail as the first step in establishing a business relationship, whereas a Westerner may deem the overall purpose of the initial e-mail to be making a one-off deal.²⁰² The concept of *guanxi* should be integrated into the use of the AIDA approach to ensure a maximum effect on the Chinese receiver.

The four steps of the AIDA model (and *guanxi*) can be linked to the purposes of the moves of the e-mail detailed above. The purpose of attracting the recipient's attention, which is achieved in the moves based on logical (and emotional) appeals, mirrors the first step of AIDA model. The second step of the AIDA model, holding interest, is achieved primarily via personal appeals. This is done in the moves that aim to achieving a positive, polite and cooperative image. The third step, arousing

²⁰⁰ Zhu: 2005, p. 75

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² *ibid.* p. 87

desire to act on the proposal, is linked primarily to the logical appeals and secondarily to the emotional appeal. This again is linked to the purpose of persuading the receiver to accept the business proposal by giving positive appraisals of the company and products.

In the fourth step, the receiver should be enticed to react positively to the proposal, which is presented using emotional appeals.

Last, but certainly not least, is the relationship notion of guanxi. It is presented via emotional appeals, which in a polite, respectful and praising manner hopefully creates a foundation for a long-term relationship between the two communicators.

This way of categorising and linking the purposes from the move structure with the AIDA-steps (and the most prominent appeals linked to these) is summed schematically up in the following:

Communicative purposes of the e-mail	Most important appeal	AIDA steps + guanxi
To attract the recipients attention	Logical/Emotional	Gain attention
To achieve a positive, polite and cooperative image	Personal	Hold interest
To persuade the receiver to accept the business proposal by giving positive appraisals of the company and products	Logical/Emotional	Arouse desire
To solicit a positive response and encourage further communication	Emotional	Elicit action
To establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith	Emotional	Guanxi

7.5 Analysis of a Chinese business letter

The following letter is extracted from Zhu: 2005. Zhu had twenty different, randomly selected Chinese sales letters rated according to effectiveness by Chinese managers, and the following letter was found to be the one most likely to elicit a positive response.²⁰³ We will use the e-mail to identify moves and steps which we believe to be beneficial for PM to emulate.

We realize that the PM e-mail we have chosen to analyse dates two years back, whereas this traditional Chinese business letter is ten years old. This is to be taken into consideration when comparing the two. Naturally this comparison may give a slightly uneven representation of the two genres, but we feel that we will be able to get a basic idea of the specific moves and steps inherent to each region.

In the following, the moves of the letter will be emphasised in bold lettering and the steps in normal lettering.

²⁰³ Copied from Zhu: 2005, p. 95-96

Moves and steps	E-mail
Salutation	Honoured company,
Greeting	How are you? You must be very busy with your work.
Introductory move / Establishing credentials	As a branch of No. 1 Motors Group of China, Xuzhou Shunda Motors Company Ltd was established in September, 1990. It is located in the ancient city – Xuzhou. With seven years of hard work and immense efforts, this company is taking on a brand new look.
Introducing the product Essential detailing of the product Evaluating the product	Our consistent goal is to produce comfortable and luxury cars of high standard and good quality. We have all the expertise in manufacturing skills. The cars we produce are equipped with advanced assembled imported engines, air-conditioning, electric windows, a modern and novel dashboard, and a unique ABS braking system. Our cars are characterized product by powerful engines, quick acceleration, low-noise motors, low petrol consumption, spacious seating, stylish shapes and low price. Our cars enjoy a high reputation for their performance and quality in Huaihai Economic Zone, and even in the northern and middle parts of China.
Establishing credentials	Shunda Co. Ltd. Has developed today into a large enterprise in the Huaihai Economic Zone, and is the envy of the motor manufacturers of modern and luxury cars.
Soliciting a response	We are offering various kinds of special prices. If you are interested in our products please contact us. We are going to hold a marketing day of the latest car models (the specific time for this will be informed later). Welcome you to come and place an order, or hold trade talks with us. We will offer you warm-hearted service. Looking forward to hearing from you soon.
Closing move	Thank you for your cooperation! Sales Department Xuzhou Yada Motor Co. Ltd Date

Salutation

The phrasing *honoured company* indicates a level of politeness and respectfulness used in the attempt to establish a relationship which is typical for Chinese business writing.

Greeting

Although we recognize the importance of the greeting in *guanxi* matters and in maintaining harmony, we believe that PM should use a less colloquial type of greeting. They should compose it in their own words in order to preserve the respectful yet friendly tone.

Introductory move / Establishing credentials

The Xuzhou Yada Motor company refers to its parent company to give an impression of strength. It also underlines the hierarchical nature of the Chinese business culture as described in the above analysis according to the formal vs. informal cultural dimension. By using this third party reference, they raise their personal appeal thus affecting the interest level of the recipient as detailed in the section on AIDA analysis above.

Introducing the product

The products and company are presented using the *we* approach thereby upholding a level of formality (compared to the *you* approach). This approach is used in conjunction with an abundance of positive adjectives; e.g. *comfortable, luxury, advanced, modern, powerful, and stylish*. This way of presenting the product arouses the receiver's desire to act favourably to the offer. This move is usually presented in a similar style in both Eastern and Western business correspondence, and typically involved the steps *essential detailing of the product* and *evaluating the product* (as is seen above).

Establishing credentials

This move further strengthens on the personal appeal used in the introductory move. They attempt to enhance their image in a positive way by describing themselves as the *envy of the motor manufacturers of modern and luxury cars*.

Soliciting a response

In this move the company encourages the recipient to contact them to obtain more information and furthermore invites the recipient to meet. It is customary for Chinese companies to gather as much information as possible on the potential business partner before initiating negotiations. This should be emulated by PM as well. The Chinese company offers non-specific pricing on their product range. This it is not often seen in initial Chinese writing, and we do not recommend that PM include any references to pricing in their initial correspondence.

Closing move

The letter is closed in a common way by thanking the recipient for his or her time and co-operation. This adhering to formula schematics should be observed in this type of writing.

7.6 Analysis of an e-mail from Progressive Media

The following is an analysis of the moves and purposes used by PM in one of their e-mails. CEO Thomas Nielsen explained in our meeting with him that he, over time, has developed a mental template, which he uses for composing e-mails.²⁰⁴ It is based on e-mails received from others, on material copied from competitors, and on learning-by-doing. We have chosen the following e-mail as prime example of writing based on this mental template.

We have divided the e-mail into the move structure detailed below:

Moves	E-mail
Subject	Development partner
Salutation	Dear <i>[first name]</i> ,
Greeting Third party referencing	<i>[Full name]</i> at <i>[company name]</i> was kind enough to provide me with your contact details.

²⁰⁴ Cf. appendix 1

<p>Introductory move</p>	<p>I represent Progressive Media, a Denmark-based developer of games for mobile/wireless devices. We've been active in the mobile space the past couple of years, with several titles on different devices and platforms under our belt.</p> <p>Our work with mobile phone games has been a side business for us for a while, but we're now preparing to focus our business and focus exclusively on wireless device development.</p>
<p>Introducing the proposal for partnership</p>	<p>We are therefore looking to establish new longterm development relationships with leading publishers around the world.</p>
<p>Greeting Praising the recipient</p>	<p><i>[Recipient's company name]</i> is clearly a company performing well in both the console and mobile space, and one of the publishers that we believe would be very interesting to work with.</p>
<p>Introducing the proposal for partnership</p> <p>Third party referencing Detailing essentials of the product portfolio</p>	<p>This e-mail is to quickly introduce our company to you, in the hope that you would be interested in discussing future development projects.</p> <p>To give you a brief idea of what we have done and can do: We've worked with both original and branded content, in our own productions as well as in work-for-hire productions for publishers. Among the titles we've produced are the official SonyEricsson T3xx/T6xx version of the 80s classic <i>[game title 1]</i> (platform: Mophun), the official <i>[game title 2]</i> game (platform: J2ME), distributed through <i>[large international telecommunication distributor]</i> for the Tour De France this year), <i>[game title 3]</i> (platforms: J2ME and Mophun, an original title developed and published by ourselves), and <i>[game title 4]</i> (platform: Symbian - an OTA distributed 3D action game currently on its way through distribution to operators). A few details about some of these are available from our site at http://www.progressivemedia.dk</p> <p>Quick work-in-progress images and video of our 3D mobile fighter <i>[game title 4]</i> are available from <i>[hyperlink to company homepage]</i></p>

<p>Establishing credentials</p>	<p>We focus on delivering the highest quality, both technically and artistically. We do have experience with a broad range of devices, including more traditional games consoles. We are licensed developers for Gameboy Advance, Nintendo DS, Nintendo Gamecube and Microsoft Xbox, and have development experience on several of these.</p> <p>We have a gained good understanding of both publisher and distributor needs in connection with mobile phone and console game production and distribution.</p> <p>We are comfortable handling the entire development cycle, from brainstorming and designing over coding, producing art and audio, to porting, testing and deployment.</p>
<p>Introducing the proposal for partnership Indicating the benefits of partnership and products</p>	<p>And as we are still a start-up looking to prove and strengthen ourselves, I'm sure you will also find our development costs competitive as well.</p>
<p>Soliciting a response</p>	<p>I would be very interested in knowing more about working with <i>[recipient's company name]</i> - Whether you are currently looking for external developers to place development projects with, or/and if you would be interested in considering taking in new projects (both in the mobile phone and Nintendo GBA / DS field) ?</p>
<p>Closing move</p>	<p>Any details on <i>[recipient's company name]</i> focus areas or what type of content you are looking for specifically would ofcourse be very helpfull too.</p> <p>I hope to hear back from you soon.</p> <p>Thanks,</p> <p>Thomas Nielsen Managing Director Progressive Media ApS <i>[e-mail address and telephone number]</i></p>

Subject

Based on our previous analysis of the move structures, we find this subject line too vague and uninformative. It needs to be more precise and concrete, but at the same time consist of a clear message and topic. An example could be: *Invitation to partnership with international software developer*. With this phrasing PM indicate the purpose of their proposal, encouraging the establishment of a relationship without being deal-focused, and at the same time strengthening their personal appeal by presenting themselves as an international company.

Salutation

The first-name salutation is to us very informal. It is safe to say that, when approaching a Chinese company, one should never use first-name titular as it indicates a level of informality only applicable when writing to personal friends or family. The initial salutation (along with the greeting, introductory move and closing move) should show respect and lend face, hereby providing the basis for creating good guanxi.

Greeting

In this move PM is using a third party reference in order to enhance their image and level of credibility, which is advisable. Praising the company of the recipient is also recommended when attempting to create a relationship, as the greeting forms the basis of the first impression.

Introductory move

The introductory move should be used to create an attractive image of your company by appealing to Chinese values. As status is typically ascribed in China, it is not advisable to inform the recipient of the fact that PM is a fairly young company, and furthermore that the production of games for mobiles phone has been a secondary business till now.

Introducing the proposal for partnership

In this move the specific intention of the proposal is clarified. This kind of phrasing is likely to be well received by a Chinese recipient as it focuses on several important terms: *long-term relationship*, *leading publishers*, and *around the world*. *Long-term relationship* relates to guanxi and *leading publishers* caters to the Chinese sense of status. *Around the world* indicates that PM has the means of reaching around the globe.

Greeting - Praising the recipient

In this phrase PM is praising the recipient, but according to our analysis of the move structure which is based on typical Chinese business writing, the move is misplaced. When writing to a Chinese recipient we suggest that this is done in the introductory greeting.

Introducing the proposal for partnership

When introducing the proposal PM promotes itself by referring to previous work, its most successful products and by using a prominent third party reference to a large international telecommunication distributor, which are all important steps according to our analysis. PM continuously uses the *we* approach to present itself and thereby upholds a certain amount of formality. The phrasing could, however, contain more positive adjectives in order to capture the reader.

Establishing credentials

PM is in this move again enhancing its image by mentioning previous fields of activity and elaborating on its experience. In our opinion, however, PM could benefit a lot from employing this move after the introductory move in order to maintain the recipient's attention.

Introducing the proposal for co-operation

When considering the Chinese conception of status and hierarchy and the importance thereof, it is not advisable for PM to present itself as a *start-up*. Furthermore, mentioning price may seem too deal-focused for the initial proposal.

Soliciting a response

PM's solicit of a response consists of a request for more information.

This move is linked very closely to the closing move, and the use of soliciting terms like for example the phrase *we look forward to hearing from you* has more or less developed into closing moves.

Closing move

PM ends the e-mail by soliciting a response, as described above, followed by an e-signature with relevant contact information.

In summary, the move structure of PM's e-mail is in good agreement with our diagram of standard move structure. However, PM needs to be consistent in the use of *we* as opposed to both *we* and *I*.

7.7 Comparative e-mail structure analysis

The following list will display the main points where the two letters differ:

Optimal e-mail structure	The Chinese letter	PM's e-mail	Suggestions for PM when writing to China
Subject	N/A	Vague and uninformative	Be precise and concrete. Subject should consist of clear message and topic.
Salutation	Very respectful and distanced	Informal (first name titular)	Use <i>Dear + title + surname (+ first name)</i> .
Greeting	Very colloquial	Enhanced by third party referencing	Keep using third party references to boost personal appeal. Praise the receiver in a respectful tone.
Introductory move	Refers to parent company	Portrays themselves as young and up-and-coming. Refers to mobile phones as (formerly) secondary business.	Present the company as worth and effective. Stress the international aspect. Use references to boost personal appeal.
Establishing credentials	Praises themselves using vague phrasing	Praises themselves by mentioning areas of expertise and previous fields of activity	Keep enhancing image by mentioning areas of expertise and previous fields of activity

Introducing the product / proposal for partnership	Introduces the product using many positive adjectives.	Utilises third party references and <i>we</i> approach. Refers to previous work, successful products. Very succinct and to the point.	Should keep using the same contents and references spiced with more positive adjectives and lexical boosts.
Soliciting a response	Provides invitation to meet	Provides vague invitation to co-operate	Refrain from mentioning price whatsoever. Consider suggesting a meeting with the Chinese counterpart at a fair etc.
Closing move	Standard closing	Standard closing	Use standard closing. Consider adding an extra solicitation for response.

The above schematics contain our suggestions for PM on how to structure and compose the initial e-mail in a business context. This will be elaborated on below and juxtaposed with our other findings on Danish and Chinese e-mail composition.

8. Communicative strategy guide

The main goals for PM when dealing with their Chinese counterparts are partnership promotion and building a relationship with the Chinese receiver. This is attained through the use of the AIDA approach. The initial e-mail should guide the receiver through the four steps of the AIDA model and at the same time aid in establishing the *guanxi* connection and upholding harmony. This is stylistically helped by using the most effective and appropriate appeals in the various moves. The purposes of the of moves link them to each step in the AIDA model.

For example, making the receiver act favourably on the proposal is labelled *eliciting action* in the AIDA model. This step is mirrored in the purpose called *to solicit a positive response and encourage further communication*, which is fulfilled in the move entitled *soliciting a response* using a linguistic style based on emotional appeals. Thus, in this way, the goals of partnership promotion and relationship building are obtained through the utilisation of the AIDA model with the *guanxi* element added.

8.1 The structure of an optimal e-mail

This linkage between the five categories move, step, purpose, appeals, and AIDA steps (including *guanxi*) is shown in the figure below:

Moves	Steps	Purposes	Primary appeals	AIDA steps + Guanxi
Subject	Heading	To attract the recipients attention	Logical/Emotional	Gain attention
Salutation	Salutation	To establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith	Emotional/ Personal	Guanxi
Greeting	Greeting clause Third party referencing Praising the recipient			
Introductory move	Providing background information on PM	To achieve a positive, worthy and prestigious image	Personal	Hold interest Guanxi

Establishing credentials	Providing specific credentials Third party referencing			
Introducing the proposal for partnership	Detailing essentials on PM Detailing essentials of the product portfolio Indicating the benefits of a partnership deal and products Referring to previous successful projects/products Third party referencing	To persuade the receiver to accept your business proposal by giving positive appraisals of PM	Logical/Emotional	Arouse desire
Soliciting a response	Making a request for response	To solicit a positive response and encourage further communication	Emotional	Elicit action
Closing move	Good-wishes Signature and date	To establish relationship by adhering to formula schematics and expressing good faith	Emotional	Guanxi

In summary, using the findings in the above figure should help in fulfilling PM's short term goal of initiating partnership as well as help in fulfilling the long-term goal of entering the Chinese telecommunications market by way of this professional relationship with one of the largest companies in the business. PM should also bear in mind the importance of keeping a respectful tone and utilising the appropriate appeals to maintain the harmony throughout the correspondence. Combining these conclusions provides PM with tools to employ when composing an initial e-mail proposal.

9. Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to provide PM with cultural insight into Chinese business culture and to develop specific communicative tools for them to use in the composition of an initial e-mail proposal.

On the basis of our theoretical cultural framework, we have, through a comparative analysis of the Chinese and Danish business cultures, established which factors influence the communicative process and the manner in which they do so.

Before we began our research for this project, we had an assumption that Chinese culture would prove to be very closed off and traditional as a result of their communist heritage. The comparative e-mail analysis and the many sources on Chinese business culture have proven to us that this is not necessarily so. The e-mail analysis section showed us that the Chinese letter followed the steps of the AIDA model. The Western business culture has had its influence on China.

In the cultural dimension regarding the level of uncertainty avoidance, the outcome of the analysis surprised us as well. We had expected a higher level of uncertainty avoidance due to several factors influencing the Chinese national culture, but came to realize that in this specific dimension, China is not that different from Denmark. We ascribe this fact with the opening of borders as we explained in the introduction, and conclude that the recent successes for the Chinese business world have inspired them to look beyond borders and see foreigners with less suspiciousness.

The Chinese business culture is still permeated with some of the more traditional values, though. Customs such as maintaining guanxi, upholding harmony, keeping face, and focussing on relationships between communicators are still highly prevalent. This is why we chose to establish a basis of cultural awareness of the Chinese customs for PM to use.

One of the prevalent traditions that we have come across numerous times, is the need to use third party intermediates when wanting to enter the Chinese market. It is clear that this is a strong reminiscence of guanxi, which is still a very dominant notion in all layers of Chinese culture – from national to business and corporate culture. But though guanxi is still highly essential in Chinese

business, the tradition of using third party intermediates is slowly diminishing. It is now becoming more and more acceptable to rely on third party referencing instead, thus making contact directly.

We have throughout the process tried to interlink the two main parts of the report: The more general focus on cultural dimensions and definitions on the one hand, and the communicative, linguistic focus on e-mail composition on the other. The cultural findings and the process of mitigating culturally induced misunderstandings play a large part in the specific e-mail composition procedure: It provides the whole basis on which the structural composition rests. This is seen in how we apply the results of the comparative business analysis on Denmark and China to the specific moves of the e-mail. It may seem somewhat schizophrenic at times, but we feel these two portions of the report compliment and complete each other.

During the making of the report we have used parts of renowned scholars' theories and models and moulded them to fit our approach. Though we use these materials out of their original context, we believe that they can be applied in this way without losing any essential meaning. In this way we have created an analytical and theoretical approach that is unique to this report. The choice of background material, empirical data, theory etc. always influences and shapes the outcome of such an endeavour.

That was exactly why we chose Gullestrup as our basic cultural stepping stone, since he advocates the idea of using a flexible mould of his theories to fit the exact purpose of the analysis. Moreover, we have relied heavily on his manifest/core value assertions as a leitmotif throughout our report in combination with the elements taken from the large range of acclaimed scholars. Had we chosen to use other materials as the basis of our report, the outcome would naturally have been different.

During our work, we have also found infirmities in some of the theories used alongside shortcomings in our analysis and the overall theme of the report:

For one, we are quite aware of the fact that, as already mentioned, the relatively moderate English skills of some Chinese business people may in practice cause most of our efforts to be superfluous. However, as we also partially concluded inside the report, we find that thoroughness equals trustworthiness, and by setting high standards from the initial approach, chances of success will be maximized.

Secondly, the usage of the bipolar dimensional measurements in the cultural sections is also questionable, since it has been pointed out that using bipolar scores makes one outcome rule out the other – even though they can in fact co-exist. Still, however, we have found this basic notion to fit our purpose adequately, as we did put strong focus on producing results with easy comparison possibilities. On that account, we have chosen to accept the generalisation risk that the bipolarism includes.

As a closing statement, we would like to emphasize that the ground being conquered by making an optimal proposal is only a small step on the way towards establishing a long-lasting and profitable business relationship in China.

After this initial e-mail approach, it would be highly recommendable to opt for a visit to China, and thereby adding the essential interpersonal dimension to the relationship; the dimension that is so crucial in this impressive guanxi stronghold.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview with PM CEO Thomas Nielsen

Appendix 2: Enclosure A (Selected PM proposal for partnership)

Appendix 3: Questionnaire - Respondent 1

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Appendix 6: Questionnaire - Respondent 4

Appendix 1

Interview med Thomas Nielsen, administrerende direktør i Progressive Media, den 15. maj 2006

Spørgsmål

1. E-MAIL SOM MEDIE

- Føler du umiddelbart, at der er nogle begrænsninger ved brugen af e-mail som kommunikationsmiddel? (Fx til brug af juridiske dokumenter el. lign.)

Ud fra et praktisk synspunkt, så nej – fordi al kommunikation, vi foretager, herunder også kontraktforhandlinger, foregår via e-mail. Så ingen praktiske begrænsninger. Problemet er snarere, at det er mere upersonligt i forhold til telefon. Jeg er selv bedre i mail end i telefon. I e-mails kan det være svært at spore sig frem til nuancer (tonefald, nonverbal kommunikation) Det er meget dialogisk, en form for ping-pong, og der er en stor fordel i hastigheden. Yderligere er det godt, at man altid har ting på skrift – det er juridisk bindende.

- Hvilke formalia bruger du? (tiltale, hilsen, vendinger, e-signatur etc.)

Findes der uskrevne regler om tone og formelle elementer i jeres branche?

Ja, det gør der sikkert, men ikke på skrift. Dog tænker jeg på det – specielt hvis jeg skriver til højerestående folk. Jeg anvender en meget venlig tone, når jeg kommunikerer med tætte samarbejdspartnere, og en mere formel tone over for nye partnere.

Jeg er meget formel over for kundeleverandører. Når det går videre til udvikling, bliver det meget tættere – og vi tilføjer hinanden på Messenger. Gradvist bliver kommunikationen mere uformel.

Har du indtryk af, at andre følger formelle regler når de mailer til jer?

Generelt er det ens for alle nationaliteter. Et eksempel herpå er: IG Games i Indien, det virker som om, de har gjort meget for at indpasse sig. De virker meget ydnyge i forhold til europæiske kontakter. Deres brug af fagord virker lidt påtaget – de virker mere formelle under overfladen.

Hvis ja, hvem gør det? (nationalitet, alder, firmastørrelse etc.)

Asiatiske er mere formelle og mindre direkte. Hvis vi bliver kontaktet af en asiatisk partner, så er de langt mere høflige og lægger meget vægt på troværdighed, hvorimod europæiske er mere direkte; mere 'bilforhandler -agtige' i form af "Skal I bruge noget xxx?"

- Er grammatik essentielt i jeres branche?

Dette er ikke mit indtryk, eftersom branchen er så globaliseret med mange kulturer. Der er mange, som ikke har engelsk som hovedsprog. Men generelt foregår alt på engelsk, og de fleste er dygtige til det. Jeg lægger ikke mærke til det som sådan, og det har ikke indflydelse på, om vi vil handle eller ej. Så skal det være meget slemt.

2. FREMGANGSMÅDE VED KOMPOSITION AF E-MAILS

- Har du en specifik procedure, du bruger, når du skal skrive en forespørgsel til udlandet?

Hvis ja, hvordan er du kommet frem til den?

Det ved jeg ikke. Det har udviklet sig løbende. I starten var det meget tom snak, hvorimod vi i dag har mange produkter og succeser at præsentere.

Hvis ja, hvilke kilder har du trukket på?

Konkurrenter i høj grad.

Hvis ja, varierer du proceduren i forhold til hvilken nationalitet, du skriver til?

Nej, der er ingen forskel.

Hvis ja, varierer du proceduren i forhold til hvilken status personen, du skriver til, har?

Ja. Dette afgøres ene og alene af titlen. Titlen er af stor betydning for mig, da jeg gerne vil vide, hvem det er, jeg taler med.

Hvis jeg får svar fra en person der er længere nede i hierarkiet end mig, er det ikke noget problem. Jeg kunne ikke finde på at bede om at komme til at tale med én, der var højere i hierarkiet, da dette ikke har nogen betydning for mig – bare personen er kompetent. Jeg har ikke handlet med personer uden en form for titel.

Hvis ja, bruger du samme procedure til alle? (både danske og internationale kunder)

Ja, jeg kommunikerer på dansk med danske kunder.

Andre lande: Ikke så meget med andre lande, men sommetider har der tidligt i korrespondancen været misforståelser. Dette sker dog mindre, når man lærer hinanden at kende. Et eksempel er franskmændene, der har det med at lave nogle sjove sætningskonstruktioner.

VEDR. SVAR

Vi får langt fra svar fra alle – og de fleste følger vi ikke op på så meget. Vi venter en uges tid og rykker – max. 1 eller 2 gange. Generelt bruger vi vores energi på dem, der svarer.

Hvis det er en kunde, vi virkelig gerne vil have, så kontakter vi dem på en messe.

Nogle enkelte vender tilbage med blankt nej (generelt fra forskellige regioner). De siger, at de ikke har plads til flere etc. – der altid en grund, men nogle gange er det standardvendinger. Vi kan godt vende tilbage til dem f.eks. et år efter, hvor de så takker ja. Jeg har der henvist til tidligere korrespondance (i dette tilfælde var det et svensk firma).

Et enkelt firma i Finland er også vendt tilbage med et nej uden grund – dette irriterede mig, så jeg fulgte op på dem.

- Inkluderer du alle oplysninger i første mail, eller gemmer du noget til senere i korrespondancen?

Jeg inkluderer alle relevante oplysninger i første mail, i hvert fald i hovedform/overskriftsform. Jeg tager alle emner med i håbet om, at nogle fanger interesse. Jeg bruger referencer til egne produkter eller samarbejde med respektable partnere. Det er specielt vigtigt at fortælle, hvem man "leger med" - dette virker i øvrigt også på mig selv - også selvom det måske ikke er et produkt, der sælger helt vildt.

Generelt har man i vores branche kendskab til hinanden, men der eksisterer lidt gruppedannelse – Europa handler med sig selv etc. Kommer meget ud fra teknisk udgangspunkt, da der er forskellige standarder.

Det kan være endnu sværere med Europa-Asien, da der både er tekniske og sprogmæssige barrierer.

Hvis nej, skyldes dette e-mail mediets indbyggede mulighed for 'chat' eller dialog korrespondance? (dvs. at man kan maile frem og tilbage hurtigt og lade 'samtalen' vandre i forskellige retninger?)

Det kan man godt sige – hvis de vender tilbage, er det en god indikation på interesse. Jeg vil ikke lave mailen for lang, så jeg medtager ikke historie, antal medarbejdere etc. – vi toner det ned og fokuserer mest på produkterne. Jeg lægger selv mærke til, hvis et firma har mange ansatte, og jeg ville også skrive det selv, hvis vi var 100 ansatte i vores firma.

Det er sådan lidt letkøbt at beskrive firmakultur, synes jeg. Men jeg gad godt vide, om nogen ville finde det interessant.

3. MODTAGERS FORVENTEDE RESPONS

- Hvilke indtryk vil du gerne have at modtageren får? (professionalisme, venlighed, image af virksomheden etc.?)

Det er noget med professionalisme, kvalitet, erfaring. Vi vil gerne fremstå business-minded og gå til sagens kerne med det samme. Det vi laver er et håndværk, og vores kunder skal bruge dette håndværk. Det er et spørgsmål om at få kommunikeret vores kompetencer ordentligt ud, og det gør vi uden for meget overflødig snak.

Hvilke dele af din procedure bruger du til at give hvilke indtryk? (et par eksempler er nok)

Ja, ubevidst prøver jeg det. Kompetencer skulle gerne stå frem som følge af de produkter, vi nævner. Og professionalisme kommer frem ved at vi refererer til andre. Jeg vil også gerne give indtryk at kunne levere "value for money". F. eks. ved at nævne komplekse produkter vi har udarbejdet på kort tid giver indtryk af, at vi er dygtige og kan håndtere det.

Jeg har selv respekt over for folk som går hurtigt til sagen - det plejer at være et tegn på at de mener business, og at de er dygtige og har noget at have det i. Dette vil jeg også gerne afspejle i mine e-mails.

4. FAGSPROG

- Har du indtryk af at fagsproget indenfor jeres branche er det samme over hele verden? (specifikke termer)

Hvis ja, er du nogensinde stødt på problemer som følge af misforståelser med fagtermer?

Nej, egentlig ikke. Kun hvis det er en person, der ikke ved, hvad han taler om. Kan ikke lige komme på nogle eksempler. Hvis de bruger ord forkert, kan det påvirke, om jeg vil arbejde med dem.

Hvis nej, hvad gør I for at imødegå disse forskelle?

Vi gør egentlig ikke noget. Vi undgår at arbejde med nogen, der ikke ved, hvad de taler om. Vi har aldrig oplevet, at nogen har brugt et fagsprog, vi ikke kendte til – kun en enkelt gang med nogle franskmænd, men vi fandt ud af det franske slang via ordbog på nettet. Vi har aldrig ringet og spurgt til det – for vi ville selv blive ked af det hvis nogen kritiserede vores engelskbrug. Nogle kinesere, vi brugte, stoppede vi samarbejdet med, da det var så svært at forstå dem. Deres fagsprog var næsten uforståeligt.

5. KULTUR

- Har du haft kontakt med kinesiske, potentielle forretningsfolk på messer etc.?

Ja, en enkelt kan jeg huske. Jeg prøvede, at få det stablet på benene, men det var meget overfladisk – selvom de var potentielle kunder. Vi mailede lidt sammen, men samarbejdet strandede ved prisen.

- Hvis ja, har du lagt mærke til områder, hvor de er specifikt anderledes end dig? (hilsen, emner i samtalen, humor etc.)

Han var meget standard-kineser, efter min opfattelse. Meget høflig og meget påpasselig med ikke at være for frembrusende. Dog havde han en frembrusende amerikansk sælger med som virkelig ville sælge noget.

- Har du nogensinde tænkt over de kulturer du selv er en del af? (national, faglig, ung vs. gammel lederskab etc.)

Ja, jeg synes jeg har haft en fejlagtig ironi-oplevelse med nogle englændere – de forstod ikke, hvad jeg mente.

Jeg har brugt ironi, hvor jeg er blevet misforstået.

Alder er også et parameter. Jeg har oplevet et par gange, at jeg, som ung, skal have en vis respekt over for de ældre og være mere lyttende. Alder giver mere respekt. Der er dog ikke så mange ældre i denne branche.

Det kan faktisk godt påvirke en handel. Jeg har oplevet, at jeg godt kunne bruge en ældre person som ansigt udadtil. En som er mere moden end mig, som kunne give indtryk at noget stabilt.

Jeg vil godt på sigt ansætte en ældre sælger. Jeg forestiller mig ikke, at det er så stor en force i Danmark som i udlandet. Men det er bare gætterier.

Hvis ja, hvordan føler du at disse kulturer kommer til udtryk i dit daglige virke? (fagligt)

Vi spiller ikke på, at vi er danske. Slet ikke i disse tider. Men dog lidt, hvis det kan bruges som fordel.

6. MODTAGER

- Hvor stort kendskab til modtager behøver du, før du sender en forespørgsel?

Jeg behøver titlen på personen. Jeg kan som regel gætte hvad en person sidder med ud fra hans titel.

Hvordan undersøger du modtager? (kanaler)

Jeg bruger Internettet. Jeg ringer ikke til andre for at få referencer.

Jeg bruger sommetider andre kollegaer/konkurrenter til at sparre lidt med.

Hvilke dele undersøger du? (økonomi/troværdighed, historie/resultater, teknik etc.?)

Position i branchen, andre samarbejdspartnere, økonomiske forhold.

Gør du dig tanker om modtagerens kultur og dermed værdier?

Hvis ja, hvilke tanker gør du dig?

Egentlig ikke ret meget, nej. I anonymitet er alle jo ens i de her firmaer. Vi har ikke billeder af os selv på hjemmesiden. Det er heller ikke mit indtryk, at andre bruger det.

- Hvilket billede af dine modtagere har du? (alder, stilling/status etc.)

Oftest er det 35-årige indkøbschefer, som er en del af ledelsen, men ikke i toppen. Og som har noget ansvar for at indkøbe og carte blanche til at handle.

Attachment to questionnaire

Enclosure A – selected PM proposal for partnership

From: Thomas Nielsen [Progressive Media]
Sent: 7. marts 2005 13:49
To: xxx
Subject: Introducing developer Progressive Media

Dear Player One,

I represent Progressive Media, a Denmark-based developer of games for wireless devices, primarily low- and high-end mobile phones.

We've been in the mobile business the past two years, where we have brought several titles to market, across a wide range of platforms (Mophun, J2ME, Symbian). We have worked with original and branded products on our own and in cooperation with leading publishers.

We are working to expand our operation, and are therefore seeking new partnerships with leading mobile publishers – I'm contacting you in the hope that you can tell me more about any possibilities in working together with Player One.

Currently we're a team has 4 fulltime employees drawing on a range of freelancers for art and sound. We're 100% focused on games, and do in-house development of original titles as well as work-for-hire for major publishers.

We have a history in the console business, and are also licensed to work on Nintendo GBA, Nintendo DS, Nintendo Gamecube and Microsoft Xbox. On the longer term, we'll be working on bringing titles to these consoles as well.

Among the titles we've launched are Audi World Cup Skiing (launched through Jamba and later worldwide this winter), Team CSC Tour Cycling (launched through Jamba last summer and later worldwide), BombJack (official Mophun port of the 80s coin-up classic).

As an example of the work we do, our major 3D Symbian-based title Fatal Arena has launched last week through Synergenix. A few details and screenshots are available through <http://www.handango.com/PlatformProductDetail.jsp?productId=158079>

We are currently working with or in discussions with several major publishers about original work and adoptions. We also work with semiconductor companies on bringing content to market based on new graphics hardware.

As for pricing models, we usually work with flat fee or royalty in advance models. We're always open to discussing other special case arrangements though.

This was just to give you an initial introduction to our company – I'm hoping you will get back to me, in order to further discuss business opportunities.

Regards / Med venlig hilsen,

Thomas Nielsen
CEO

Progressive Media ApS
Niels Jernes Vej 10
9220 Aalborg Øst
Denmark
<http://www.progressivemedia.dk>
Phone: xxx

Respondent 1

Background: 8 months internship at Bestseller in Beijing
(The Bestseller fashion group is rated among the top 5 Danish companies in China)

Questions

Cross-cultural business culture

1. Based on your experience in Danish business context (Bestseller), what are the five biggest differences in Danish and Chinese business correspondence (fx culture, formalities, contents etc.). You are welcome to list more than five items/notions.

It is important to be polite and show respect in China. This is achieved by following a few simple rules:

- *Always address people with Mr., Mrs., etc. until you know them better.*
- *Know whom you are dealing with. Gather information on people, their titles and job responsibility and direct your correspondence to the correct person.*
- *Know the rules of Chinese names – if Chinese name: family/surname is mentioned first and name last. If they have changed to a western name, they follow our rules.*
- *Never talk about money in your first communication. Build a relationship to see if there is a ground to build business – then you can talk money.*
- *Chinese people are proud, so stay clear of anything that could offend your business partner. Know some Chinese history, it will help a long way*

2. What characteristics were most obvious to you in Danish business conduct in general, and in business correspondence in particular, in your first period of employment in China?

- *The Chinese pride and pride in their work. They want to be professional and they want to show you that they know their craft.*

3. Would you consider the level of formality in Chinese business correspondence higher or lower than the Danish? Please elaborate your answer.

- *My first instinct is to say that the level of formality in Chinese business correspondence is higher than in the Danish. In China they measure your professionalism by your way of conducting business. It is a big part of Chinese culture to respect the elder and the more experienced. You show this respect in your way of addressing people and knowing your place in the hierarchy. In Denmark we are aware that you can build business in a less hieratic way and we are becoming more relaxed in our way of corresponding. I see good and bad things in both ways of running business.*

4. Have you had any specific experiences where you felt that you had to adapt to Danish business culture? If yes, please describe the experience briefly.

- *I have adapted in the way that I have accepted that I work in an international company. I work with people who are dealing in a foreign language and this in itself demands more*

understanding and patience. Chinese are proud people and you should always be aware that they do not lose face in your presence. Therefore you should always keep your correspondence clear, precise and to the point, to avoid any embarrassing misunderstandings. Instead of asking: did you understand the assignment? I would say: How is the assignment? Have I made it easy for you to understand? Should I explain something better? By asking these questions, I put focus on me and maybe I made it difficult to understand the assignment in hand. If you ask a Chinese person whether or not he/she understood something, 9 out of 10 times he/she will say yes. Even if it is not true.

5. As a person with Danish background, what potential cultural conflicts do you see in the attached proposal, made by a Danish company towards a Chinese, potential client (see enclosure A). Overall, which parts would you feel a need to change in order to make it more appealing? We are specifically interested in knowing if any phrases or contents would be deemed offensive or inappropriate from a Chinese business perspective? In general, could a certain phrase seem unappealing to a Chinese business person? Or could a specific content give the recipient a better impression of the sender?

- *Dear player one: not a good way of beginning. Who owns the company and who runs the company? Who are you supposed to be dealing with? Do your homework and find out.*
- *Please write the words to full. Do not say: we've. Say we have – this is more professional. Restrain from using slang, which is disrespectful.*
- *They write: **you** can tell me more about the possibilities in working together. You are contacting them – why should they “sell” themselves to you? Is your business worthy? I would propose a talk to see if there is any ground for cooperation between the businesses.*
- *They mention price and payment – do not mention this in your first correspondence.*

6. In your impression, what level of English skills can you expect in a large Chinese company dealing with international trade? Would you consider the level to be equal to that of the general Danish business people – or higher/lower? Please elaborate your answer.

- *The level of English skills is much lower in China than in Denmark. Even in the universities the level of English taught to the students is not very high. Most Chinese write English a lot better than they speak. This is because they are taught on the basis of remembering the written word and not so much the pronunciation. A lot of Chinese are seeking abroad for their education and this helps their English skills a lot. These are also the people that return to good jobs, so in the future it will get better.*

7. If any, please feel free to make any comment or account with reference to the intercultural experiences you have had during your stay in China (and also feel free to account for any correspondence experiences with Chinese authorities prior to going to China).

- *I think you get a lot of respect just by being a foreigner in China. They respect us because they think we have received higher education and more importantly; that we can bring business and therefore also money in the future. We can get away with breaking some of their “rules of business” because they have seen it is prosperous to do business with us. They could be losing their Chinese identity, which is a great pity.*

Respondent 2

Background: M. Sc. Eng of industrial design, Aalborg University, June 2005. Currently working for a Danish company in Beijing.

Questions

Cross-cultural business culture

1. Based on your experience in Danish business context (CBD Beijing), what are the five biggest differences in Danish and Chinese business correspondence (fx culture, formalities, contents etc.). You are welcome to list more than five items/notions.

Hard to answer this because nothing actually seems to be the same as in Denmark:

- *First and most important; it is impossible to establish an enterprise in China without having the right contacts or local partners from the beginning. Chinese companies are, in general, rather reserved when it comes to doing business with westerners. But if one has the right contacts these foreign “issues” can be handled smoothly at a nice dinner. –Here, it is also common, and not officially illegal, that money changes hands rapidly under the table. Once the first contract has been closed and the work is delivered with satisfaction from both parties, the gate is open for further collaboration and if you keep doing successful products, other companies will start contacting you for new partnerships*
- *Contracts are written as commonly as they are broken... They are more like physical gentleman agreements than something you can rely a 100 percent on. Lawsuits are quite uncommon but if you start messing too much with one company, others will know about it in weeks and your reputation is very much at stake. If you lose credits among the biggest manufacturers here, you go down before you can call your head quarter in Denmark.*
- *Replication: In a country where innovation and creativity is as uncommon as full grown beards, you guard your ideas with everything you have. Chinese trainees do not get access to the server network before they have proven themselves for 3 months as all are under suspicion of being industrial spies. Only on rare occasions do the manufacturers patent their forthcoming products, whereas the designers have to be extremely cautious about whom they allow access to the working files. Even the garbage is handled carefully and not even 2 year old hand sketches are thrown out without being shredded first, as the possibilities of spies working for competitors are checking out your stairway bin is too big. Thefts like these have actually happened!!!*
- *Workload: As a relative new enterprise in a really competitive market where you pay most of your employees after European standards and you only charge the client for half of the amount that you would in Europe, the board (in this case 100 % Chinese) will expect you to work a lot. This is not a burden or a pressure because the reward you get for delivering a state-of-the-art project here is bigger than the worries you have about working 110 hours a week. And as a share holder in the company you get rewarded substantially for a good job...*

- *Deadlines: A project with a scheduled duration of 18 months in Denmark will be carried out in 9 months in China. –The competition and the demand on this exploding market require fast response to what everyone else does. Furthermore the companies and their executives are more willing to take risks in order to execute the design process faster. –Something westerners could learn a lot of to same time and money.*

2. What characteristics were most obvious to you in Danish business conduct in general, and in business correspondence in particular, in your first period of employment in China?

- *Even large clients (including the biggest white goods manufacturer in the world) do not have any executives with proper English skills even though their latest investment was in the European market. In our office we have 10 Chinese marketing people who all graduated at the finest business Universities in China, -with honours. We bring them when we do presentations for our clients, as interpreters, but sometimes things get lost in translation when we get our feedback. This can result in weeks of work leading in a wrong direction. However, this will change in the future, as the Chinese government has acknowledged that the growth will stagnate if the Chinese company leaders do not get better at communicating on a global level. In a few generations new people will take over the important positions and they are being taught English in primary schools and colleges as this paper is being processed. The tendency of departments not daring to draw conclusions without consulting the CEO first is a huge disadvantage. Everything is controlled from the top and in many government financed businesses it is impossible to get a new pen without going all the way through a wide range of executives for approval. Most large companies are too bureaucratic.*

3. Would you consider the level of formality in Chinese business correspondence higher or lower than the Danish? Please elaborate your answer.

- *Lower - by far. As written earlier, many deals are done at dinner tables and not on formal papers. But these trades are most common between Chinese companies. Without the westerners impact in the Chinese trading and manufacturing business, things would have gotten out of hand for the Chinese. The amount of money these businesses put in the Chinese tax pond is huge. Therefore they have started to adopt the western way of doing business in order to enhance the welfare and education in the country, whereas I suspect that the pattern will change into a more formal one during a decade or two.*

4. Have you had any specific experiences where you felt that you had to adapt to Danish business culture? If yes, please describe the experience briefly.

- *Daily. You have to act extremely humble when you meet Chinese executives. When you hand out and receive business cards you do it with both hands and bow at the same time. At formal dinners you touch glasses holding your glass lower than his, showing that he is superior in the given situation. And if you know a few confirming Chinese phrases, it can effect whether you get a contract or not.*

5. As a person with Danish background, what potential cultural conflicts do you see in the attached proposal, made by a Danish company towards a Chinese, potential client (see enclosure A). Overall, which parts would you feel a need to change in order to make it more appealing?

We are specifically interested in knowing if any phrases or contents would be deemed offensive or inappropriate from a Chinese business perspective?

In general, could a certain phrase seem unappealing to a Chinese business person? Or could a specific content give the recipient a better impression of the sender?

- *To answer this question properly I would have to use more time, than I have available (sorry). First of all I would encourage the company to contact the Danish chamber of commerce or private consultants (e.g. Danish Center) who work with overseas business like this before establishing a too thoroughly partnership. A letter like this should be written in Chinese to make sure the message is understood properly and if, as I presume, the enterprise has a brilliant concept on their hand they can use these instances to help them translate and make sure that they will not loose a lucrative deal. If the Danish enterprise is dependent of a deal with this collaborator they should show that they have done a thorough research on this company, which shows that they will be “perfect future partners”. -In general, the theme of the letter is not humble enough.*

6. In your impression, what level of English skills can you expect in a large Chinese company dealing with international trade? Would you consider the level to be equal to that of the general Danish business people – or higher/lower? Please elaborate your answer.

- *Companies that work exclusively with global trade have Chinese employees with high English skills, or hire consultants for communication parts, but in general I would say that the level is significantly lower than the Danish average.*

7. If any, please feel free to make any comment or account with reference to the intercultural experiences you have had during your stay in China (and also feel free to account for any correspondence experiences with Chinese authorities prior to going to China).

- [No reply to this question]

Respondent 3

Background: Internship at the Danish Embassy in Beijing

Questions

Cross-cultural business culture

1. Based on your experience in Danish business context (The Danish Embassy in Beijing), what are the five biggest differences in Danish and Chinese business correspondence (fx culture, formalities, contents etc.).

You are welcome to list more than five items/notions.

- *Title matters... a lot!!*
- *A lot of communication. They are not good at gathering all questions/comments in one mail. It is not uncommon that a – for Danes – trivial matter is being made into a huge thing. This can at times challenge the Danes' patience.*
- *No one wanted to take the final decision. The Chinese sometimes seemed frightened to take responsibility.*
- *Slow procedure (as a result of their high context culture and Guanxi)*
- *Very hieratical set-up, which lead to the previous mentioned slow procedure.*

2. What characteristics were most obvious to you in Danish business conduct in general, and in business correspondence in particular, in your first period of employment in China?

- *I quickly realized that your title mattered a great deal. A couple of examples: I had my business cards reprinted from "Trainee" to "Commercial assistant", because the Chinese seemed to neglect me after having studied my card. This changed a lot after the alteration. The Chinese companies were also very eager to have some people from the Embassy visiting their company (especially the Ambassador). As soon as he crossed the doorstep he would be photographed so that the company in question could document to the surroundings that they were 'in the circle' sort of speak*
- *The last sentence under item 2, leads me to the most central and important term when speaking of Chinese business context: Guanxi!! Guanxi means 'relation'/'to build relationship', and it is my observation after having lived in China that this is not only a theoretical term, but also a concept on which the Chinese [business] people live by!! You cannot expect to travel to China and make business in one day (as opposed to e.g. Germany – cf. the high context culture). Things takes time – business can take a looong time. Sometimes years!*
- *Among the staff at the Embassy, the Danes could seem superior from a Chinese point of view. Despite the fact that I was "merely" a trainee, the Chinese employees perceived me as their boss. This even though that they had a higher degree of education.*

3. Would you consider the level of formality in Chinese business correspondence higher or lower than the Danish? Please elaborate your answer.

- *Definitely higher! For instance the email correspondence is very formal. You always use Mr/Mrs etc. No use of smileys! :o) During dinners the host and guest always give a courtesy speech in which they praise each other to an (exaggerated) high extent!!*

4. Have you had any specific experiences where you felt that you had to adapt to Danish business culture? If yes, please describe the experience briefly.

- *I once solely represented the Embassy in connection with a Danish company's anniversary. The Danish owner who had lived and done business in China for more than 20 years was fully aware of the importance of the Embassy's presence at his company. Because I was the only member from the Embassy, he asked me – or more correctly, he begged me – to give a speech about the company. After 30 sec. of preparation I was standing on a stage in front of 300 people (mostly Chinese) and praising this company, which product I was not particularly familiar with! A quit nerve ragging experience for, but a very important for the Danish company!*

5. As a person with Danish background, what potential cultural conflicts do you see in the attached proposal, made by a Danish company towards a Chinese, potential client (see enclosure A). Overall, which parts would you feel a need to change in order to make it more appealing? We are specifically interested in knowing if any phrases or contents would be deemed offensive or inappropriate from a Chinese business perspective?

In general, could a certain phrase seem unappealing to a Chinese business person? Or could a specific content give the recipient a better impression of the sender?

- *The themes of the games that the company is referring to are not of high interest to the Chinese. I mean they have no history of being interested in cycling and skiing.*
- *I would suggest that the company refers a bit more to the company it contacts, e.g. praise it or call it sucking-up in order to make them feel important.*
- *Maybe it would be an idea to inform them that you are planning to travel to China and it would seem logical for you to meet on a social basis (cf. guanxi :o) 'Be direct in an indirect matter. It's all a matter of the wrapping...'*
- *I would personally never mention price/pricing models in an introductory mail. As for pricing models, we usually work with flat fee or royalty in advance models. We're always open to discussing other special case arrangements though.*
- *Basically, I think it is a fairly good mail (expect for the thing mentioned in item 5b). I don't find any reason to over-mystify the Chinese people. You will come a long way with a bit of tact and charm.*
- *Maybe I would add 'kind'/'best' in regards. It is my personal experience that that is how the mails are ended.*

6. In your impression, what level of English skills can you expect in a large Chinese company dealing with international trade? Would you consider the level to be equal to that of the general Danish business people – or higher/lower? Please elaborate your answer.

- *On an average basis I have to say that the Danes are better at English. Having said that, if you compare a young highly qualified Chinese with an old Dane he situation could be the opposite. There is a high focus on the English language among the Chinese youth.*

Frequently, one would be addressed by some young Chinese students in a mall, because they wished to practise their language skills with a westerner.

7. If any, please feel free to make any comment or account with reference to the intercultural experiences you have had during your stay in China (and also feel free to account for any correspondence experiences with Chinese authorities prior to going to China).

- *Getting a VISA to China can be a long procedure. Again very bureaucratic!*

Respondent 4

Background: 6 months internship at Widex China, Shanghai

6 months internship at the Danish Chamber of Commerce in Beijing

Questions

Cross-cultural business culture

1. Based on your experience in Danish business context (CBD Beijing), what are the five biggest differences in Danish and Chinese business correspondence (fx culture, formalities, contents etc.). You are welcome to list more than five items/notions.

- *Patience is very much appreciated when doing business in China*
- *Networks (guanxi) matter!!!*
- *English skills is not a guaranteed skill*
- *Always have many business cards on you (and make sure to deliver and accept it with both hands) Note: Take your time to read the card immediately – don't just stuff it in your pocket.*
- *Accept and respect the value of 'face' in China – don't ever cause your business partner to loose face.*

2. What characteristics were most obvious to you in Danish business conduct in general, and in business correspondence in particular, in your first period of employment in China?

- *Correspondence? Hmm, it was quite difficult in the beginning since my colleagues' English skills were very limited*
- *Business conduct – the small, but famous word: Guanxi really do matter.*

3. Would you consider the level of formality in Chinese business correspondence higher or lower than the Danish? Please elaborate your answer.

Somewhat higher, since agreements in China are rarely made without having had the 'big boss' involved in the final discussions. Also, there are many rules for a foreigner to keep track off:

- *Don't say no to a beer when having dinner with a business partner – if asked.*
- *Don't give a wall clock as a present – the word is similar to the word for 'death'*
- *When eating with chopsticks don't stick them vertically down in the rice – resembles candles at a cemetery*

4. Have you had any specific experiences where you felt that you had to adapt to Danish business culture? If yes, please describe the experience briefly.

- *Yes, especially when it comes to discussing with your colleagues. Even though I have had lunch with my colleagues many, many times I still have to 'control' my temper during discussions. Since I'm 'below' them, I can't argue with them directly in front of other colleagues. This has to be taken into private surroundings, where we can discuss it alone. Tough one!*

5. As a person with Danish background, what potential cultural conflicts do you see in the attached proposal, made by a Danish company towards a Chinese, potential client (see enclosure A). Overall, which parts would you feel a need to change in order to make it more appealing? We are specifically interested in knowing if any phrases or contents would be deemed offensive or inappropriate from a Chinese business perspective? In general, could a certain phrase seem unappealing to a Chinese business person? Or could a specific content give the recipient a better impression of the sender?

- *I personally find that the letter would be more reader-friendly if it was divided into more paragraphs. Furthermore an exciting heading could be added to every paragraph. However, there is no accounting for tastes.*
- *Furthermore, my Chinese colleague has read enclosure A, and she does not find anything wrong about it. In her opinion the letter is well-written, however, something about willingness to adjust the products to the Chinese market could be added.*

6. In your impression, what level of English skills can you expect in a large Chinese company dealing with international trade? Would you consider the level to be equal to that of the general Danish business people – or higher/lower? Please elaborate your answer.

- *Lower, but sufficient enough. Often their written English skills are better than their oral ones – but still – a lower level can be expected. But in such a case – a translator would be brought in by the company.*

7. If any, please feel free to make any comment or account with reference to the intercultural experiences you have had during your stay in China (and also feel free to account for any correspondence experiences with Chinese authorities prior to going to China).

- *Often I have to bite my tongue not to criticize the Chinese bureaucratic system, where it takes up to a year to switch banks, several months to update your 'papers' with the government and many stamps just to deposit a check in the bank. But in the end – it works – it just takes time.*
- *The Chinese authorities prior to going to China: The Chinese embassy in Denmark is worthless. Once you get your first visa – which will take you some time if you wish multiple entries – it's easy to get it renewed in China. No problem.*